Film Quarterly

Volume 53, Number 3, Spring 2000

The Startle Effect in Film

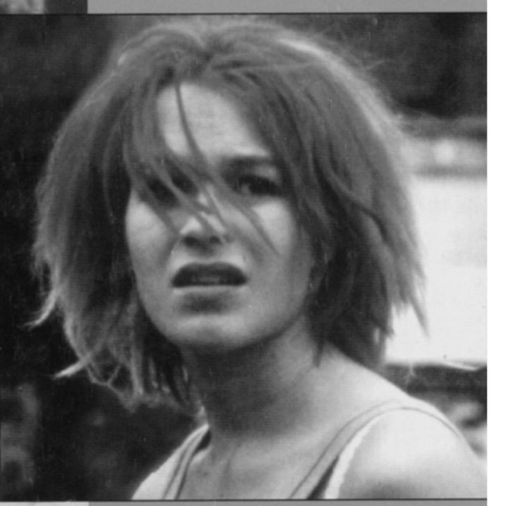
Ally McBeal—Thin Air

REVIEWS

Run Lola Run

Eyes Wide Shut

Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl



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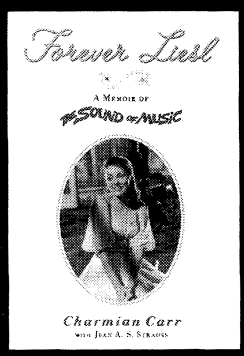

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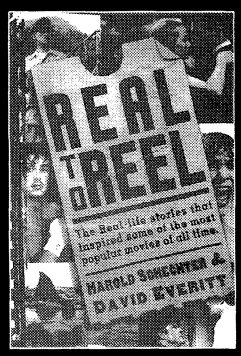

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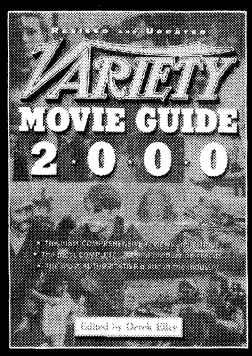

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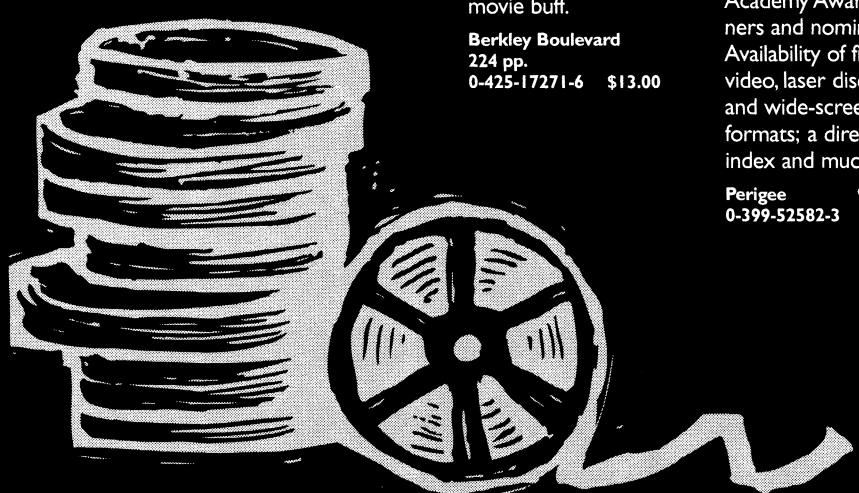

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Michael Jarrett

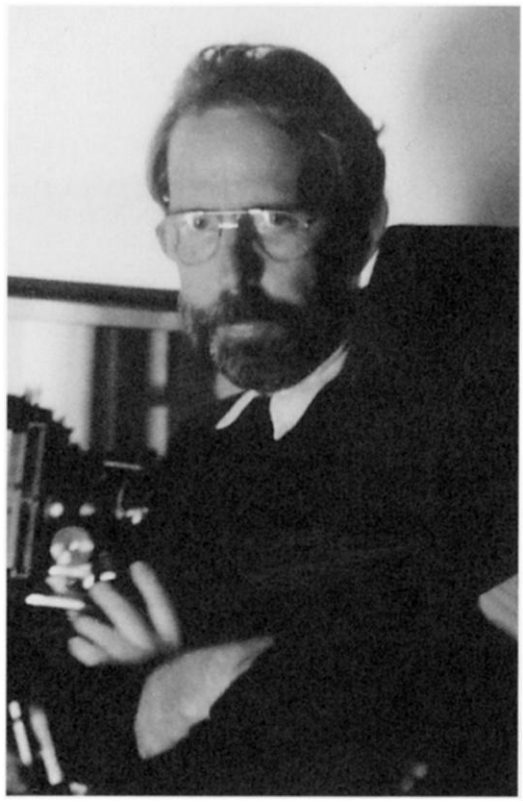
Sound Doctrine

Walter Murch picture edited *The Conversation*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Julia*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Ghost*, *House of Cards*, *Romeo Is Bleeding*, *First Knight*, *Godfather III*, *The English Patient*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and numerous other films. Plus, he has written a concise and highly readable study of editing, *In the Blink of an Eye*. But note this: The following interview concentrates not on Murch the picture editor, leaning over an Avid in a cutting room assembling a film's image track, but on Murch the sound designer and re-recording mixer. For once, the eyes don't have it, and the term "soundtrack" is meant literally. It refers to every sound—to the collage of voices, noises, and music—that a movie-going audience hears coming through speakers, not just to a potentially marketable collection of music isolated from the film it accompanies.

Murch cares about soundtracks. Listen to *THX-1138* (1971), *The Godfather* (1972), *American Graffiti* (1973), *The Godfather, Part II* (1974), *The Conversation* (1974), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Crumb* (1994), *The English Patient* (1996), or *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999). Murch mixed them all, and they each possess an audio allure. They sound as good as they look.

It's hardly surprising, then, that Murch ended up remixing and re-editing Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958). Welles, more than any other director before him, employed sound—to evoke cinematic worlds, establish mood, and raise goose bumps. For example, in *Citizen Kane*, the audio montage that condenses Susan Kane's singing career into a dizzying burst of music and noise anticipates "Tomorrow Never Knows," the Beatles at their experimental best. And as for the opening sequence to *Touch of Evil* . . . now that Murch has replaced Henry Mancini's studio-mandated mambo with the audio-vérité track that Welles originally designed, it recalls nothing so much as musique concrète (Pierre Henry) or electronica (Josh Davis/DJ Shadow)—

An Interview with Walter Murch



Walter Murch (above)

Sound design, from far left: *THX1138*; *The Talented Mr. Ripley*; *American Graffiti*

or, yes, the soundtrack to *American Graffiti*. Indeed, the newly realized *Touch of Evil*—for 40 years a virtual movie, a movie that Welles hoped against hope Universal would edit and distribute—might register most forcefully with a contemporary audience schooled on films, such as *American Graffiti*, that Murch edited and mixed.

In short, Murch stands as an important figure in cinema because he and a handful of peers realized possibilities offered by multi-track recording. (Or in materialist terms, the development of multi-track recording technology significantly broadened options available during postproduction, creating a niche for Murch and his peers to fill. It was thus crucial to the outpouring of independent films in the late 60s and 70s.) For while the possibilities of editing and mixing sounds had been glimpsed early on—long before the arrival of the talkies—they remained largely inaudible until magnetic tape emerged as an economically viable and practical recording medium. Tape made sound malleable, much like celluloid made visual images malleable. And that exposes an anomaly. If we want to understand the history of edited images we start by looking to the films of Eisenstein, Vertov, and Pudovkin. To understand the history of edited sound, we do well to listen to Murch's work with Lucas and Coppola.

MICHAEL JARRETT: *Has film sound led us to hear the world differently?*

WALTER MURCH: Yes . . . sure. I hesitate only because Welles was doing the same kind of thing with radio back in the 1930s. Then he continued to innovate when he got into film. If you listen to many of his films, including *Touch of Evil*, if you don't watch the picture, you kind of hear the sort of things that he was doing on radio, both with dialogue and sound.

Never before in history, before the invention of recorded sound, had people possessed the ability to

manipulate sound the way they'd manipulated color or shapes. We were limited to manipulating sound in music, which is a highly abstract medium. But with recorded material you can manipulate sound effects—the sound of the world—to great effect. In the same way that painting, or looking at paintings, makes you see the world in a different way, listening to interestingly arranged sounds makes you hear differently.

Touch of Evil *recalls themes and approaches developed in your own work—the theme of surveillance, the use of source materials. Was working on it something like gazing into a mirror?*
In a way, yes. It wasn't a film with which I was intimately familiar before I began work on its restoration. I'd seen it a couple of times, but I hadn't studied it the way some people have, on a frame-by-frame basis. Obviously, when you do a restoration, you really have to get down with the film on a very deep, technical level. But yes, I'd done work on *The Conversation*, which was all about surveillance, and *American Graffiti*, which was all about the creative use of source music. Welles had anticipated both of those things in *Touch of Evil.*

Are there people in film, besides Welles, that you regard as anticipating later accomplishments with magnetic tape?
Certainly Murray Spivak, who was one of the premier and earliest sound editors. He worked on *King Kong.* You'll find the most creative use of sound in films like *King Kong* or in Warner Brothers' cartoons of the 30s and 40s—and Disney to a certain extent. They weren't limited by reality, and so they recorded interesting, fantastic sounds and then arranged and combined them in interesting ways—more so than features. Features were late in developing that sensibility. I grew up on Warner Brothers' cartoons. They laid down a very rich bed of information that I became aware of only much later. Whenever you work in film, you're working with tape. It just happens to be tape with sprocket holes in it.

By all accounts, the division of labor at RKO, where King Kong *was made, and at Warner Brothers, with Tex Avery, Raymond Scott, and Chuck Jones, wasn't as strict as elsewhere. Ideas could circulate.*
Exactly. Remember that sound alone, just the fact that there was sound at all, was a huge thing in the 30s—for ten years. We've had Dolby sound in theaters for almost double that amount of time. You can imagine the sense of accomplishment in getting any sound at all and, then, to investigate stories with spoken word and a certain amount of sound effects. Plus, it was a corporate world in the sense that there were very few independent motion pictures, and those that there were made had tiny budgets. Sound was expensive; they couldn't do much inventive work on that level. The push had to come from the director—somebody like Hitchcock or Welles. Otherwise, the tendency was to do a journeyman-like job and not spend too much money. The really creative use of sound was something that took time. But there are many exceptions to that rule. Renoir, for example, claimed to be the first person to record a toilet flush and put it in a movie.

Taking an example from your own work, when you edited sound on American Graffiti, *did you have an entire radio show recorded that you could reference as needed?*
Yes. We produced a two-hour radio show with Wolfman Jack as DJ—with commercials, with the songs. George [Lucas] built that show himself. While he was editing the film, he edited the songs, the commercials, and the disk-jockey patter. That is what's called a "B-track." It ran alongside the dialogue during the editing of the film.

And what did you bring to the production?
The acoustic treatment of "worldizing" it, so that it seemed to be something that existed in real space. The idea was that every teenage car in this town was turned to the same station, and, therefore, anywhere you went in the town, you heard this sound echoing off the buildings and passing by in cars.

George and I took the master track of the radio show and played it back on a Nagra in a real space—a suburban backyard. I was 50-or-so feet away with a microphone recording that sound onto another Nagra, keeping it in sync and moving the microphone kind of at random, back and forth, as George moved the speaker through 180 degrees. There were times when microphone and speaker were pointed right at each other, and there were other times when they were pointed in completely opposite directions. So that was a separate track. Then, we did that whole thing again.

When I was mixing the film, I had three tracks to draw from. One of them was what you might call the "dry studio track" of the radio show, where the music was very clear and sharp and everything was in audio focus. Then there were the other two tracks which were staggered a couple of frames to each other, and on which the axis of the microphone and the speakers was never the same because we intentionally couldn't remember what we had done. Sometimes, Wolfman Jack would be on axis on one track, but he would be off axis on the other track. I was able to blend those three tracks to get

Touch of Evil

the right amount of atmosphere. I could make transitions from a live, very present sound to something that sounded like it was very distant and bouncing off many buildings. I could create a sense of movement too—hence, the moving microphones.

This is what I discovered Welles had done in a more primitive form in *Touch of Evil*. What he had not done was combine the original recording and the atmospheric recording. He simply positioned a static microphone in an alleyway outside Universal Sound Studios, re-recording from a speaker to the microphone through the alleyway. He didn't have control over the balance of dry sound versus reflected sound, and he didn't have the sense of motion that we got from moving the speaker and moving the microphone relative to one another. This creates the sonic equivalent of depth of field in photography. We can still have the music in the background, but because it's so diffuse, you can't find edges to focus on and, therefore, the dialogue which is in the foreground and which is in focus is clearly what you're supposed to be listening to. That was the defect of all previous systems, except for Welles' system. We came up with a way of taking music that might, at one point, be fully in the foreground—in focus and loud—and, then, during a scene transition, sent way into the background and thrown out of focus so that people could talk in the foreground in dialogue and not have you driven mad.

The sonic space that's created in American Graffiti *really gets opened up in* Apocalypse Now.
American Graffiti was in mono. *Apocalypse Now* was my first stereo film. All of the films I'd worked on up until that point were mono. So I jumped with both feet into the fire, not only doing a stereo film but doing the first dramatic quadraphonic film.

With it, the audience gets a sense of being surrounded by sound: there are sound sources in back and in front.
You have to be very careful about what sounds you put behind the audience. They can distract attention away from the screen. We had a whole list of do's and don'ts: sounds that were permissible in the back and sounds that were not permissible in the back. Sounds that have great definition we kept in the front.

On Apocalypse Now, *you and others had to edit an enormous amount of film. Was there a comparable surfeit of audio tape?*
No. At the time of shooting almost no usable sound was recorded for the film because of the difficulties of production. We had what is called a "guide track." We had to recreate the whole sonic environment, item by item, for the finished film, including almost all the dialogue. Once you have the image, that immediately begins to narrow down what you will use for sound. It's still a huge amount, but when you have sound, you're, thankfully, being guided by what you see in the picture.

How did you get the helicopter sounds in that movie?
We got the Coast Guard to cooperate. We went up to Washington State and for three or four days recorded all kinds of different helicopters. At the beginning of the film, where we wanted a more abstract approach, we took the helicopter sound and recreated it element by element on a synthesizer.

If you listen to a helicopter approach from a distance, fly overhead and then away, it's got many different stages that it goes through. We took each of those stages and said, "Alright, here we'll hear only the flap of the blade. We don't hear any motor. Let's do a flap." So we fooled around on the synthesizer until there was a flap that we felt was suitably abstract but helicopterish enough. And then the other elements, the turbine whine, the whoosh of the thing through the air, and all of those different aspects of it.

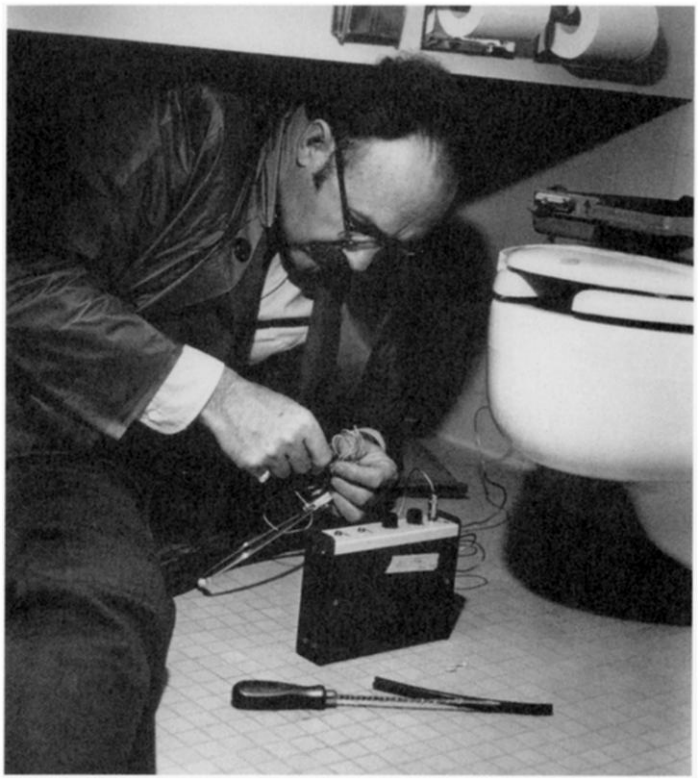
You've written that you were led to a career in sound design by hearing Pierre Schaeffer's musique concrète. It's striking to note similarities between Schaeffer's compositions and the sound of Welles' films.
A lot of what Welles did in *Citizen Kane* and what he'd done earlier on radio is a kind of musique concrète. Schaeffer's innovation was to apply the then-new technology of magnetic tape to recording and assembling sound and, then, to give performances in musical venues and call it musique concrète—concrete, as opposed to abstract, music. It was a big revelation. But if you listened to what was produced for films and to much of what was done on the radio by innovators such as Welles, it was the same kind of thing.

It also turns out that the first piece of musique concrète—Étude aux Chemins de Fer—*features train sounds. Schaffer anticipated your use of train noises in* American Graffiti, The Conversation, *and* The Godfather. *What do you make of this reccurring motif?*
You have to remember that those films were all made within about a year of each other. Trains were on my mind. Apart from that, I love the sound of a train. If you think of it as a musical instrument, it's a very complex, interesting sound. You can go into record stores and find whole bins full of train sounds.

Over time people have had a lot of associations with trains. Perhaps not so much now but certainly when I was growing up, they were the thing that talked to you about travel. The whole idea of moving from place to place in the world was dominated by that sound. So it was a mixture of all those three things. I remember talking to people in England in the 1960s who were old enough to remember when trains were first put through in remote parts of the country. They always talked about the thing that changed was the sound—that you couldn't go into that part of the world anymore without the presence of that sound. So they thought of trains primarily in terms of sound and only later in terms of their visual effect.

So how did you come to introduce the sound?
On *American Graffiti* we were doing some pick-up shooting, a couple of shots after the main photography had been done. We were at the used car lot. I heard a train in the distance. It was like two o'clock in the morning. I'd been trying to figure out how I was going to do

Apocalypse Now



The Conversation

that section, and I thought, "Oh, yes, I could do a train." So in a weird way that location and fate made me alert to the possibilities of using a train there.

I was mixing *Graffiti* when we were shooting *Conversation*, and that sound was, again, suggested by the actual environment in which Harry Caul had his warehouse, which was really five or six blocks away from where American Zoetrope, the studio, was. There's a shot, quite early on, after the first apartment scene in which Harry talks to his landlady and plays the saxophone. He goes to work the next morning, and you see him picking his way across railroad tracks in order to get to the entrance of his warehouse. In fact, just on the other side of that warehouse is the main switching yard for freight and passenger trains coming into San Francisco from the south. So the idea was triggered by what's actually in the environment.

I always like to think, not only about the sound of the space a character is in, but also about what's outside—to break the wall and invoke some kind of presence of the exterior. Of course, it has to be a reasonably loud or percussive sound, something with a tonality to it, in order to penetrate through walls. Otherwise, you hear a generalized wash of city noise, which sounds like pink noise. It doesn't have much character. So it was a matter of looking for sounds with character that could get through the window and which were also true to the environment that Harry's in. That's really the extent of it. If the environment in which Harry works has trains in it, then he and, by extension, we are going to associate that sound with that environment. Because they are in the atmosphere, trains are going to worm themselves into Harry's dreams.

And then the train becomes a metaphor for the process of editing.

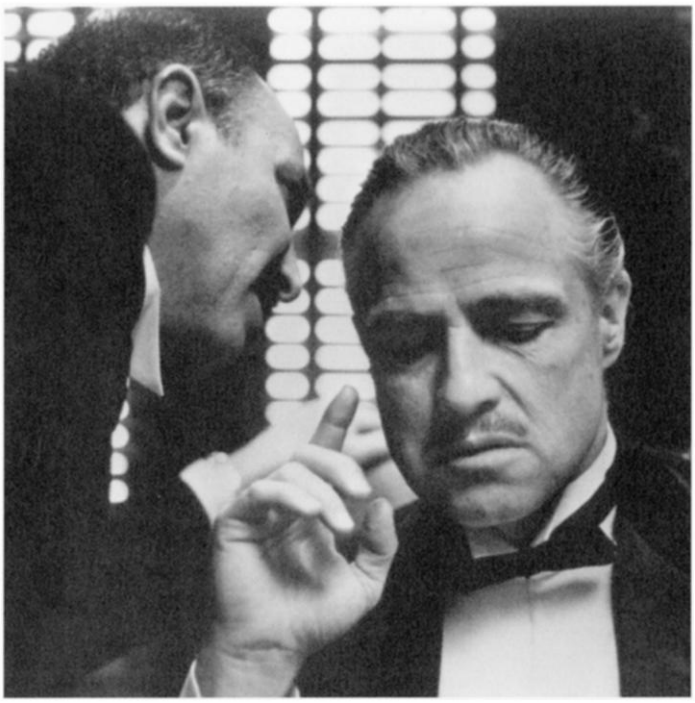
Oh yes, like putting one car after the other. Somehow there is this affinity between trains and film. The two rows of sprockets are kind of like the two tracks. It's all a geared and mechanical kind of world, certainly when film started out. It's shifting now with digital machines, but if you look at old film equipment and listen to an optical printer while it's going, you hear this clackity-clack, clackity-clack, clackity-clack sound. If you slow the projector down far enough, it will sound pretty much like a train, too.

The other thing about trains, which is what I mentioned with helicopters, is that they are very complicated, big mechanical objects that move at various speeds through space. As they do that they reveal a kind of chromatic array of the components out of which they are made. The very distant train has a very particular kind of sound; the close-up and idling train has another sound. Steam trains are more interesting sound-wise than diesels.

In your book—In the Blink of an Eye—*you outline six rules for editing images. Are there comparable rules for editing sound?*

You have more freedom with sound than you do with picture. There are, consequently, fewer rules. But the big three things—which are emotion, story, and rhythm—apply to sound just as much as they apply to picture. You are always primarily looking for something that will underline or emphasize or counterpoint the emotion that you want to elicit from the audience. You can do that through sound just as well as through editing, if not more so. Rhythm is obviously important; sound is a temporal medium. And then, story. You choose sounds that help people to feel the story of what you're doing.

That example of the elevated train in *Godfather* is something that's primarily an emotional cue. There's rhythm to it but only to a certain extent, and story-wise it's a little ambiguous. "What is that sound? What is it doing in the film?" There's not an easy answer to that. But emotionally you absolutely understand what that sound is there for. Because there's nothing in the picture that is anything like a train—although it's



The Godfather

reasonable that a train might be heard in that part of the Bronx—the emotion that comes along with that sound, which is a screeching effect as a train turns a difficult corner, gets immediately applied to Michael's state of mind. Here is a person who is also screeching as he turns a difficult corner. This is the first time he is going to kill somebody face to face. He's doing what he said he would never do.

Do you recall how you came up with that idea?
Francis [Coppola] wanted to not have any music in that scene; he wanted it to come in after the murder was over, after Michael had dropped the gun the way Clemenza told him to. Only at that moment would these big operatic chords come in. He felt that if he had music earlier, its effect would be diluted. He was quite right. Yet we looked at the scene and said, "You know, it just kind of sits there unless we have something. Well, let's try some sound effects." It being the Bronx, and since I grew up in that part of New York, I remember—again, just like in *American Graffiti*—I remember those kinds of places always being close to elevated trains. So I came up with this idea of the screeching which I remembered from my youth as being a provocative kind of sound. We did a test—tried it, and it worked. So it went in the film.

Basically, you're saying that audiences should be able to work with sound in a manner similar to the way Eisenstein said they should be able to puzzle out the meaning of edited images.
That's the key to all film for me—both editorial and sound. You provoke the audience to complete a circle of which you've only drawn a part. Each person being unique, they will complete that in their own way. When they have done that, the wonderful part of it is that they re-project that completion onto the film. They actually are seeing a film that they are, in part, creating—both in terms of juxtaposition of images and, then, juxtaposition of sound versus image and, then, image following sound, and all kinds of those variations.

I always try to be metaphoric as much as I can and not to be literal. When you're presented with something that doesn't quite resolve on a normal level, that's what makes the audience go deeper. Again, that train screech in *Godfather* is a good example. It doesn't make any sense from what you're looking at. You haven't been shown a train anywhere in the neighborhood. The loudness with which you hear it is too loud. Even if you were in a restaurant right under an elevated train, it wouldn't be quite that loud. So the audience is presented with a discontinuity. They're looking at very still images, close-ups of people talking in a foreign language, and yet they're hearing something completely different. That forces them to say, "What is that? What could that be?" Again, not consciously but subconsciously. And, as a result, they come up with a feeling about Michael's state of mind, and then they re-project that feeling onto his face.

Do you recognize auteurs of sound?
Yes, in the sense that different people have generally different approaches. But it's so influenced by the director and by the kind of film it is that I don't think you can quite entertain that idea to the same extent.

Do you listen to music?
Yes, but I also listen to the environment that's around me. When I'm making a film, I'm like a particularly thirsty sponge and will pull up things in the environment and think, "Oh, I could use that." A trivial example is in *Apocalypse Now*. At the end of Kilgore's beach party, there's the sound of helicopter turbines starting up. It pre-laps the transition to when the helicopters are already in full wing.

At a party he'd thrown for Marty Sheen, Francis had arranged a helicopter to take Marty from Napa to a baseball game at Giant Stadium. I was at the party, and I heard this sound of the helicopter turbines starting up, and I immediately saw that transition and thought, "Hey, this would be great! That sound could pre-lap the cut. Then, when we do cut, it could hit very

hard with the sound of dozens and dozens of helicopters idling on the ground." Rather than simply cut with that sound, we had something slowly building illogically underneath Kilgore's dialogue. There are no helicopters at night when he's saying, "Charlie don't surf." But what you hear under the dialogue is this turbine whine accelerating. Musically, it gives you a sense of anticipation and a windup. Something's about to happen.

Your response to environmental sounds recalls the recommendations of John Cage.
I was a big fan of John Cage in my teenage years.

What are your feelings about nondiegetic music?
Do you mean ordinary film music? I generally think music is used too much. But the general principle, for me anyway, is that although music is an effective rallier of emotions—it can provoke emotions in people—it's best used in film as something that directs or channels emotions that are already present. If a film becomes too dependent on music to create the emotion, there's a kind of steroid-like artificiality that comes into play. The audience, without knowing it, begins to feel manipulated. What I'd much rather have happen is that the scene itself—and that scene from *Godfather* is a perfect example because it provokes an emotion—I'd rather, when music comes in, that it tell the audience *where* to channel that emotion, what twist to put on that emotion. Is it a safe emotion? Is it a heroic emotion? Is it an uncertain emotion? That's when music, to me, is most effective.

The Conversation

Clarify the role of re-recording mixer versus the role of sound designer. You're credited as doing both tasks.
It's a nebulous area. The origin of the term sound designer goes back to *Apocalypse Now*, when I was trying to come up with what I had actually done on the film. Because Francis had wanted to do the film in this quadraphonic format, which had never been done before, that seemed to require from me an analysis of the design of the film in a three-dimensional space of the sound. I thought, "Well, if an interior designer can go into an architectural space and decorate it interestingly, that's sort of what I am doing in the theater. I'm taking the three-dimensional space of the theater and decorating it with sound." In my case, that was where sound designer, the term, came from.

Later on, people appropriated it, which is certainly their prerogative, but it also has come to mean the person who designs interesting, unique sounds. So if you have a sound that you can't get from a library, that you can't go out and record yourself, but that you have to concoct out of a different number of contributing sounds, that is what the sound designer does.

Combining a number of different sounds to make a single sound, that—in miniature—is exactly what a re-recording mixer does. They take all the different sounds prepared for a film and mix or blend them in an interesting, developed way that can be sustained over a two to two-and-half hour period. But the conditions under which mixers and sound designers work are very different. The sound designer usually works in a kind of sound laboratory, whereas re-recording mixers work on a sound stage, usually with the director present. And some re-recording mixers are sound designers and vice versa.

How did you arrive at the distorted sounds heard at the beginning of The Conversation*, those sounds we hear when the recorded voices of Cindy Williams and Frederic Forrest break up?*
Even as early as 1973, there were already shudderings of the world of digital sound. It hadn't hit yet, but we knew that people were experimenting with it. I thought, "It's slightly logical that Harry Caul would have a digital setup of some kind. In fact, the only way he would

be able to do what he does—remove an overlay of drums and reveal a voice behind—is by some kind of digital subtraction. If he's recording and the signal goes off, it would be interesting if, when it went off, the digital algorithm that underlays it is revealed." Instead of the signal just getting weaker or instead of it getting static-y, it could somehow begin to break down into its digital elements. I found a synthesizer and sent the voices through it. I processed them—the control track—with square waves and various other things to get what was an approximate indication, to me anyway, of a digital signal. The motive was everything that I've just been talking about. The means was sending the voice through an Arp synthesizer, a fairly state-of-the-art analog synthesizer for 1973.

When did you shift from working with analog machines to digital ones?
It was fairly gradual. What I've done ever since *The Conversation* is edit the picture and, then, mix the soundtracks. Because the schedules were long on *The Conversation* and, to a certain extent, on *Apocalypse Now*, I was able to do all three things: edit the film, edit sound, and then mix it. Since then, however, schedules have not allowed me to do sound editing other than the sound that I'm working with when I cut the picture. I depend very much on collaboration with a sound designer or a sound supervisor—whoever it may be—to receive the ideas that I've developed during the cutting of the picture and to generate material that I can then use to mix the film.

The first film I worked on that had any digital elements to it was *Godfather III* and, then, *Romeo Is Bleeding*, which was '94. *Romeo* was the first film that I worked on where the sound was edited on work stations. But I didn't do that editing. I edited that film conventionally, and a sound supervisor, Dane Davis, did the sound on a work station. A couple of years after that, in '96, I started editing on the Avid with *English Patient.*

I assume that while you were mixing The English Patient, *sounds were delivered to you, but that there were a few sounds that needed to be picked up or designed after you'd already finished editing?*
Yes, loads—all of the sound effects in the film: the sound of the planes, the sandstorm, many occasional sounds—footsteps, sounds that objects make, the sounds of jeeps, machine-gun fire, campfires, the whole atmosphere of the desert. In reality, the desert itself was absolutely quiet, which made for great dialogue recording, but the problem is, if you simply played it the way it was, it would sound artificial. So we had to develop a signature of the desert, what you might call an active silence that had elements that fit with the desert: a sound that wouldn't raise any suspicions and that seemed quieter than if we had had absolute silence. Pat Jackson, who was the sound supervisor on the film, came up with a fairly complicated blend of sounds that included a very, very dry insect sound and the sound of grains of sand rolling down paper. Of the total sound of the film—including the dialogue, music, and sound effects—probably 80 percent was added at a later date.

The English Patient

The English Patient *begins with a rattle of percussion that we come to associate with vials of medicinal oils. Do you labor over that first sound that the audience will hear?*
No. In the case of *The English Patient*, that montage of little sounds at the beginning was a very late addi-

tion. It was generated in the last two weeks of making the film. Once we had the title sequence in place, the film seemed to call out for something—a little montage of desert sounds to locate you in space and time. And so Pat came up with those things. I made suggestions about some of the elements, but she came up with everything else.

In mixing that opening montage, you move from percussive to orchestral sound and, then, to male voices chanting. Those voices then resolve into the sound of an airplane engine. Did you use ProTools or some digital means to tune the sound of the airplane engine or the voices?
The voices were in tune with the music that Gabriel [Yared] had already composed. So we tuned the airplane engine to them. We've been doing that for years. The sound of the outboard motor in *Godfather II* was tuned to harmonize with the music that Nino Rota wrote. This is when Fredo was being taken out into the middle of the lake. We tuned the engine, but in those days we did it by speed-varying the tape recorder.

I'd wondered how much tuning goes on versus how much we in the audience are required to reconcile disparate sounds.
Musical tonalities are very tricky. If you're slightly off, it sounds bad. The audience can't say, "Oh, that's a quarter tone out. I'll resolve it." Instead, you hear a dissonance that you can't resolve. Music is a good case where a gestalt completion just can't happen, at least as far as tonality goes. You have to be in tune.

Through numerous dissolves, the edited images in The English Patient *orient the audience. They help us know where we are in space, and whether we're in the narrative past or present. Edited sounds seem to function in an opposite way. They often blur one place into another, or they link past and present.*
A good example of that is the scene where Hanna [Juliette Binoche] is playing hopscotch, and you hear the sound of her hopping around and dropping the whistle or whatever the metal object is that she's throwing. That sound blends with the percussive sound of Arab music in Count Almásy's [Ralph Fiennes'] head until you can't distinguish one from the other. You then go from that environment into the desert. In another scene there's a Benny Goodman tune with a clarinet solo, and out of a clarinet note comes the sound on an incoming artillery shell. All of a sudden, you're in Tobruk during a siege and a lot of munitions are going off. In that case, there is no picture dissolve, but the sound has made a transition for you from clarinet to artillery, anticipating what's about to happen.

For whom do you mix a film: for people who hear it in state-of-the-art theaters, for people in small rooms at cineplexes, or for people who'll catch it on video?
It's always a compromise because you can produce only one mix. It has to be a mix that will play in both small theaters and large theaters. It just so happens that large theaters are less forgiving than small theaters. If you mix for a large theater, it will tend to play all right in a small theater. You can get into very serious trouble going the other way, mostly with dynamic range. The balance between the energy of average dialogue versus the loudest sounds in the film has to be very carefully controlled for a large theater. The large theater will suck up dialogue and yet reproduce sound effects and music very efficiently because of the energizing of the field that happens with music. Music is continuous, and, thus, it's like it sets up a reverberant pattern that resonates within the theater. Dialogue is individual words separated by silence. They aren't capable of energizing all of the cubic feet of a large theater with the same efficiency that music is. Compared to music, dialogue has to be raised relatively loudly if you're mixing for a large room.

You seem always to employ sounds that have a plausible origin in the film's world.
Yes. If you stretch it too far, it just becomes absurd. You haven't given the audience enough of the circle to know whether it's a circle or not. You have to use intuition and trust your instincts. At a certain point there's nothing else to guide you.

And then, also, try stuff out. Don't be afraid. What I've always found, consistently, is that you can go much further than you think you can. And who is there to tell you you've gone too far? It's just you and your relationship to the work. It's an experiment to prove, as much as you can prove, what the edges of this world are.

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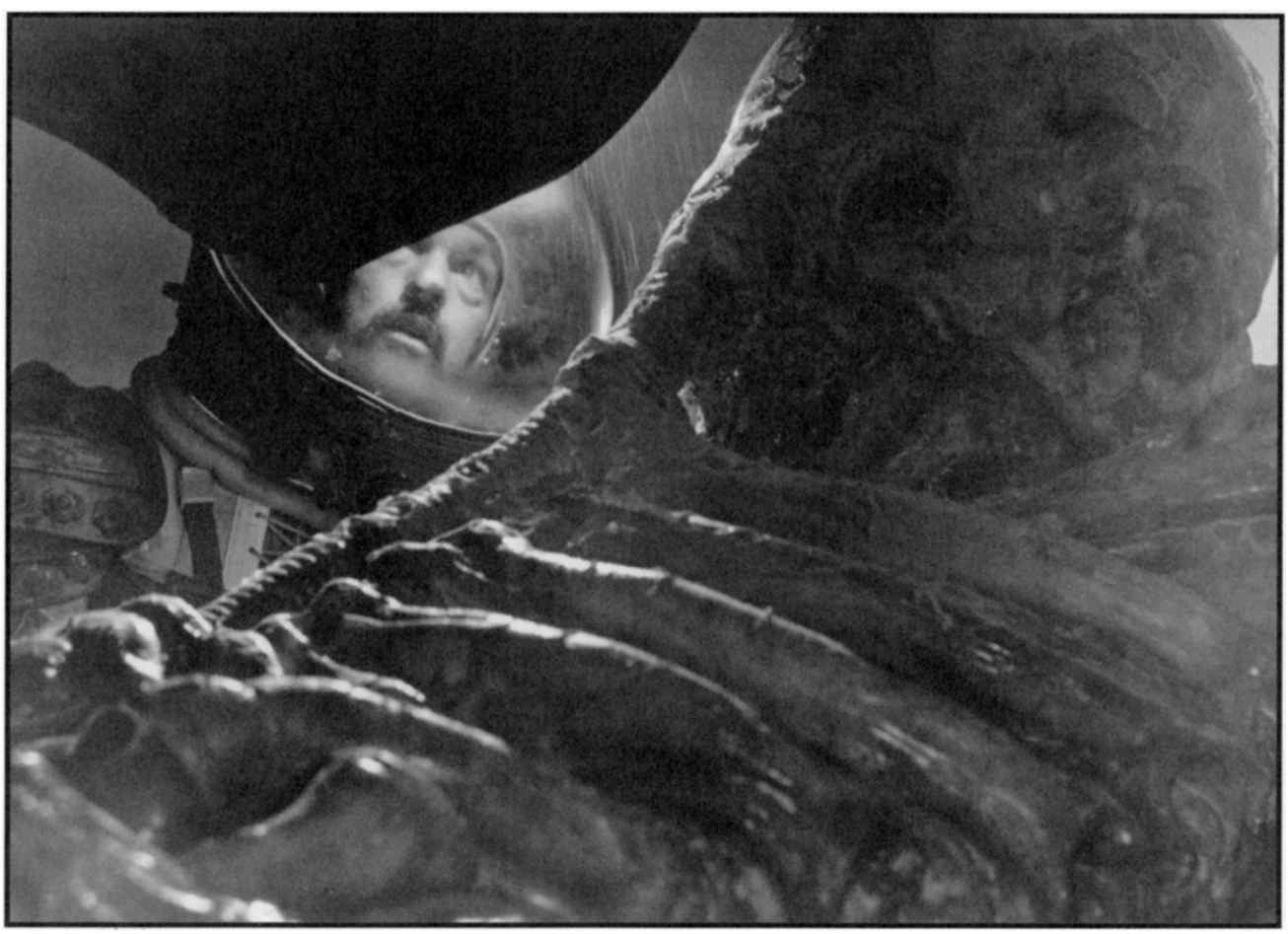
Robert Baird

The Startle Effect

Implications for Spectator Cognition and Media Theory

Lewton particularly enjoyed devising moments in his films which would cause audiences to gasp in terror. His name for these moments of sudden shock was "busses." The term derives from the Central Park sequence of *Cat People*.

—Joel E. Siegel, *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror*



Gasping in terror: *Alien*

My wife is often startled when the phone rings. The phone doesn't bother the kids or me, but all of us have, at one time or another, found ourselves alone in a room only to turn and be startled by someone hovering behind us. My son Sean, like most respectable eight-year-olds, can, to his great pleasure, startle his older sister. There are rarer and stranger startles. Once, walking across a parking lot in the middle of the day, I was startled by what turned out to be a leaf. It wasn't a dangerous leaf, but, pushed by the wind, it made an uncanny scuttling sound behind me. The sound was odd enough and "out of place" enough to startle me.[1] Garden-variety startles provide an affective punctuation to various folk entertainments such as hide-and-seek, surprise parties, spook houses. One confidante tells me that upon leaving Madame Tussaud's in London she once saw visitors who were startled by a motionless "wax figure" that suddenly moved: all a bit of fun orchestrated by the management. More typically, I once saw a horror film with a friend who was startled so frequently and forcefully that I worried he would pull a muscle. Since, at the time, I was writing a dissertation on cognition and the horror film, I did not let these and other startles pass, but considered how a leaf, or a phone, or a film can startle us, and whether the mere fact of startles and/or a theory of their function might add to or challenge current thinking about the mind and its relation to real and virtual space.

Many laymen and not a few philosophers and psychologists have been content to relegate startle to the category of dumb reflex, little more dynamic than a sneeze or a knee jerk. That film startles occur only during a particular scene type should alert us that something complicated and odd is occurring. Indeed, I believe film startles reveal the fundamental characteristics of cinema spectatorship, offering the most pointed opportunity for addressing and explaining the age-old paradox that fictions and representational spaces can stimulate intense emotional responses in spite of an awareness of fictionality.[2]

Millions have been startled while watching threatening film scenes. We can pinpoint the frames in *Cat People* (1942) where one of film's first startles—a public bus of all things—bursts into frame; we can study the exact moment in *Jaws* (1975) when Hooper, while scuba diving, is startled by a corpse popping through a shattered boat hull; we can inspect the infamous startle in *Wait Until Dark* (1967) when Alan Arkin's psychotic killer (supposedly incapacitated) leaps, Olympic-like, after Audrey Hepburn's blind housewife. My study of over 100 American horror and thriller films from the early 30s to the present reveals formal refinements and increased usage of this effect. For instance, 1942's *Cat People* deploys two startle effects, while Paul Schrader's 1982 remake offers eight, a typical example of the hypersensationalization of the post-*Psycho* horror/thriller film.

David J. Skal, echoing others, claims that the birth of cinema itself was an occasion for audience startles:

> In America, more direct and visceral means were favored to hold and startle an audience—locomotives hurtling toward the screen, for instance, or a bandit firing his gun directly into the camera's eye (both effects were employed in 1903 by Edwin S. Porter in *The Great Train Robbery*). Quaint though these techniques may seem today, they once had the power to make audience members faint.[3]

Examples such as these serve as apocryphal encapsulations of the birth of cinematic sensationalism, and, according to David Bartholomew, share something with horror:

> Its origin [horror], indeed, is the origin of all moving pictures, going right back to the Lumière brothers' 1895 exhibition of *A Train Entering a Station*, a short documentary sequence to which early audiences reacted with a frenzy, ducking away from the seemingly onrushing train on the screen and fleeing the auditorium in fear. Of course, the Lumières' little film was not a horror film as we've come to know it, but it provoked fear and *psycho*logical unease in its audiences (who had not yet learned how to "look" at movies), and that is precisely how the horror film has always functioned historically.[4]

These familiar stories of early spectator naiveté seem always to imply that more modern, media-savvy viewers can resist manipulation. No one today, after all, runs from or faints before hurtling movie trains, or flinches from camera-directed gunplay. However, viewers, even

filmmakers and media critics, can still be startled by film. The origin of this still viable startle effect is recognized as 1942, in the famous bus scene from Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur's B-movie surprise success, *Cat People*, where Alice (Jane Randolph), being followed by something from screen left, is surprised by a bus barreling in from screen right. Dennis Fischer offers a typical analysis of *Cat People*'s startle effect: "This type of scene with a slow buildup and sudden release became known as a 'bus,' and was a component in many horror films thereafter. The idea was to get the audience to expect something and then catch them totally off guard from another direction."[5]

Ironically, the first horror and thriller films of the sound era, a good ten years before Lewton, did not fully exploit the startle effect. The massively popular *Dracula* (1931) offers no end of Gothic mise-en-scène. The Count glides about, a highly visible, stately menace, never once making a startling move or entrance. This is a bit odd, for we know that the theater made use of the startle response in earlier outings. A 1927 review from the *Times* on the opening of *Dracula* in London's Little Theater suggests just how sensational the play was:

> What then conjures up a memory of the sleepless torment of an earlier evening? The noises chiefly . . . the noises are quite the sole contribution to alarm. If only you shout loudly or strangely enough, and if only you can contrive to make the sound unexpected, somebody is sure to be terrified. In that respect, at least, this piece displays a sure sense of the theater. There is very little of Bram Stoker in it. But most of us jumped in our seats at least once in every act.[6]

Meanwhile, back in the colonies, the American production of *Dracula* was touring to great success and likewise suffering criticism for its sensationalism—this from the *New York Mirror*:

> To many the eerie horrors of this shocker suggested but the impotent boos of a child dressed in a bedsheet. One jumps instinctively because of the noise and clamor of the procedure, but there is still a deep set realization of the juvenility and fallaciousness of the youngster's prank.[7]

Cat People

Like later deprecations of film startles, theater critics made it quite clear that startles were, in some manner, antithetical to art and culture. Yet startles, surely, whether theatrical or cinematic, are not without virtue. Their widespread use in the Gothic tradition suggests some value, if not for critics, then at least for artists and patrons. In this vein, the two *Dracula* stage plays didn't just resort to an occasional startle—they systematically deployed them—and with apparent glee. Skal's annotated edition of the two major productions of the *Dracula* stage play include numerous stage directions that imply potential startle effects (12 for the English play; 16 for the American). Startling sounds included a number of offscreen bursts: gunshots, terrified screams, wolf-like howls, the pounding on and tearing down of doors, and "maniacal laughs" from Renfield. Rapid visual movement was achieved through quick entrances, flashpots, and trap doors.

Relative to theater, then, Hollywood was atypically slow in developing the sensational potential of the startle effect, but, of course, theater had centuries of practice to draw from. Unlike the theatrical startle (where sheer loudness can function much as it does in real space), the modern film-based startle relies heavily on precise manipulations of editing and camera position, neither of which are available to the stage play. The simple historical lesson is that, ironically, the startle effect was not fully exploited in cinema until a decade after horror's "first wave," and then by Val Lewton, a producer frequently cited as the most literary and cultured director ever to work in horror. Lewton included and modified startle effects in all nine of his horror films, regardless of who was in the director's chair: Jacques Tourneur, Mark Robson, Robert Wise.[8] Lewton's sensational effects were soon copied by other filmmakers. An extended set piece from Lewton's *The Seventh Victim* (1943), which contains five startle effects within a few minutes, so impressed Carol Reed that he adapted it for *The Third Man* (1949).[9] Apparently Lewton's bus was worth repeating, and, like certain magic tricks, became an audience favorite.[10]

Maligned as mindless and a hallmark of B-movies and exploitation fare, the film-based startle effect can actually be found in all manner of horror and thriller films, from blockbusters like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park* (1993), and *Independence Day* (1996) to thrillers like *Jennifer 8* (1992), *The Client* (1994), and *Blink* (1994). The effect can also work on the television screen, in made-for-TV films such as *Salem's Lot* (1979), and in series such as "The Night Stalker" (ABC, 1974-75), "Tales from the Crypt" (HBO, 1989), and "The X-Files" (Fox, 1993-).

The traditional view is that startle represents the most extreme form of sensationalism, a stark contrast with the ideals of *art* and *thought*. Here is Stanley J. Solomon:

> Shock all too frequently springs merely from surprise, generated equally by a murderer leaping from a dark alley with knife in hand, and a child jumping from behind a wall and yelling "Boo." . . . The horror film, then, cannot be judged on its surprises unless the surprises are integrated into a meaningful pattern of horror. . . . Sheer sensationalism, the standby ingredient of the genre, is of course merely an avoidance of art and thought.[11]

The contempt and neglect of startle has hidden something potentially profound. A bus arrives in *Cat People* and viewers are startled; a bus arrives in *The Graduate* (1967) and viewers smile.

The Threat Scene and the Formal Conventions of the Startle Effect

The core elements of a film startle effect are (1) a character presence, (2) an implied offscreen threat, and (3) a disturbing intrusion into the character's immediate space. This is the essential formula (character, implied threat, intrusion) one finds repeated hundreds and thousands of times since Lewton's first bus effect.[12] Lacking character, threat, or intrusion, the possibility of startle appears negligible.

It is informative to reflect on films that *should* generate startles but that don't. In one category we have loud, violent, and frightening films like those from Quentin Tarantino. For all their mayhem, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) do not typically lead to startles, probably because offscreen space is not sufficiently evoked. A second relevant category of films are those that mount what I call "mock threat scenes," where the viewer watches a character teasingly feign a startle or attempt to startle a nearby character, as in *Jurassic Park*, when Dr. Grant (Sam Neil) horrifies the young children he is shepherding through the park by pretending to be shocked by a massive electrified fence. In an earlier mock startle from *The Haunting* (1963), Luke (Russ Tamblyn) annoys his fellow paranormal investigators during a spooky lull inside the old Hill House by leaping, yelping in pain, and claiming a statue stepped on his foot. Both films, of course, are notorious for startle effects that *do* work. Then there are

parodic threat scenes/startle effects, as in Carl Reiner's *Fatal Instinct* (1993), a parody of classic film noir and big-budget Hollywood thrillers. Near the end of the film, gumshoe Ned Ravine (Armand Assante), alone in his big dark house, opens a bathroom medicine cabinet—a black cat screeches and leaps out. Contextualized amidst constant silliness, *Fatal Instinct*'s cat-startle, itself formally indistinguishable from effects which *have* startled viewers, likely has yet to startle any viewer on this planet.[13]

Along with the tone of a film or sequence, pacing appears crucial to generating film startles. By "pacing," I refer to the speed at which a threat scene develops, a factor contingent upon rates of staging, camera and figure movement, editing. More complexly, pacing also consists of what we might label the viewer's perceptual comprehension rate, the maximum rate he or she may recognize objects, their locations, trajectories, and velocities within the imaginary film space. Psychologist Robert Plutchik believes cognition evolved as a mechanism to *predict the future.*[14] In this framework, startle appears to reflect microsecond failings to predict (perceptually anticipate) the identity, location, or status of a stimulus in a threatening context. We can tease out the significance of pacing to viewer surprise and startle by conducting a brief thought experiment. Let us take some infamously frightening threat scenes and potent startle effects, say from *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Repulsion* (1965), and *Suspiria* (1977), and play them for first-time viewers on a variable speed projector. It is quickly apparent that the startle effects from all these films are rendered impotent when sufficiently slowed. The results are even more revealing because, even when slowed, fear and disgust remain viable, if not amplified, during the presentation. Evidently scene pacing and spectator comprehension rate impact viewer surprise/startle. A comparison of a threat scene/startle effect in *Alien* (1979) with a derivative one in *Deep Space* (1987) will illustrate how pacing and tone renders some threat intrusions startling and others predictable, if not silly.

Near the end of *Alien*, Ripley (Sigorney Weaver), alone aboard the *Nostromo* with a deadly alien life form, decides to activate the ship's automatic detonation system and escape in a shuttle craft. With only minutes to escape, Ripley races through the hallways to a shuttle, flame-thrower in one hand, a carrying-case holding pet cat Jonesey in the other. The electronic voice of Mother, the ship's computer, warns of the ship's imminent detonation as emergency lights flash, steam is vented, and the atomic reactor overheats. Ripley backs quickly down a hall, her flame-thrower covering her retreat. It is here that director Ridley Scott expertly manipulates framing by cutting to a close-up of Ripley's sweaty, exhausted face as she leans against a bulkhead and carefully peers around a corner, white strobe flashes and red warning lights illuminating her. Scott achieves a visual frenzy corresponding to the dramatic moment. With the labyrinthine offscreen space of the *Nostromo* hallway hidden beyond the narrow onscreen close-up of Ripley's frightened face, Scott changes the tempo of the scene, Ripley's careful pause at the corner counterpointing her frenzied backtracking just moments before. As Ripley's eyes come ever closer to the unseen space around the corner, the white strobe flashes are replaced by an incessant red glow from screen right. Here Scott mounts his startle intrusion. In a shot only one-and-a-half seconds long, the viewer shares Ripley's point of view of the alien: head rearing and moving quickly, searching, perhaps sensing Ripley. The previously quiet music track erupts on cue with the alien image, an ominous bass and cello swell that matches the alien's rising movement and then continues over Ripley's horrified, frozen reaction. Realizing her access to the shuttle is blocked, Ripley returns to try to override the automatic detonation of the ship.

This effect is powerful for many reasons, not least of which is the film's overall phenomenal trajectory, which successfully engages viewers in imagining one of cinema's most dreadful offscreen threats (try to remember the alien before it was overexposed through sequels, comic books, and millions of toys). In contrast, Ripley is a sympathetic, even admirable character, and, by film's end, the sole survivor and only remaining character for viewer identification. In addition, Scott manipulates pacing at the crucial moment of the threat intrusion, contrasting near motionlessness with frenetic movement, achieved through the juxtaposition of Ripley slowly inching toward the corner in close-up and the brief shock cut of the rapidly moving alien. This shock cut is not just a narrative surprise, but a formal one, a violation of the established pace of diegetic motion, editing, and shot duration.

Alien benefited from a large budget and a good script, from Ridley Scott's experience producing slick television spots and dynamic feature films, and from a collection of crafts and effects personnel as good as any ever assembled for a science fiction or horror film. Fred Olen Ray's *Deep Space* comes out of a different tradition. One rung below Roger Corman in the pantheon of low-budget filmmakers, Ray makes films for the exploitation and straight-to-video markets. As a low-

Alien:

Ripley slowly approaches a corner as she flees a *Nostromo* about to self-destruct.

The alien rears up and moves toward Ripley/camera.

Ripley frozen with fear, just before she flees.

budget copycat of *Alien*, *Deep Space* provides an excellent opportunity to compare the effect of tone and pacing on startle affectivity.

Deep Space is set not in space, but in a large American city, where character actor Charles Napier plays a tough cop out to stop a military-industrial weapon set loose on an unsuspecting populace. The weapon turns out to be a toothy, tentacle-hurling, low-budget variation of H.R. Giger's alien design. It is this daunting beast that Napier must confront in a dark and deserted warehouse. Carrying a combat shotgun, a bandoleer of shells slung across his chest, and two pistols wedged between his belt, Napier enters the warehouse alone and is quickly startled by a band of lovely white pigeons, one of which perches on his shoulder until he carefully brushes it off. It is about this time that the viewer notes how well a fog-machine can dramatize the space of an enclosed warehouse. Continuing his search in the foggy moor of the warehouse, Napier discovers, like some misplaced basketball, the head of a security guard. As he backs away from the sight, Ray contracts the frame to a medium close-up, an unmotivated red light illuminating the actor. Napier continues to back up as the monster moves forward into the background of the shot (an obvious homage to Ripley's hallway meeting with the alien on the *Nostromo*). Throughout, the electronic music meanders in the background with little sense of rhythm or dramatic tempo. With Napier in the foreground and the toothy one in the background, the monster gives a feeble roar and Napier an equally feeble reaction of horror: the fight is on.

Obviously Ray is sending up the genre and *Alien*, but *Deep Space* does include other scenes with vigorous startles. Since threat scenes are scene-level constructions, they can powerfully and quickly establish a predominant tone of horror or comedy independent of a narrative's overarching emotional tenor.[15] The

ineffectualness of the final battle in *Deep Space* is not a result of the film's overall context (there are other threat scenes in *Deep Space* that *do* trigger startles). Rather, as products of their immediate spatial, tonal, and formal contexts, threat scenes are, considering affect, highly local and independent structures. Locally, then, Scott keeps his alien in offscreen space as much as possible, while Ray parades his alien for all the world to see. Where one threat intrusion is masterfully manipulated to generate fear and startles, the other generates ridicule, largely because the alien, already weakly rendered, is shown excessively, its intrusion more lumbering than abrupt. In the end, *Deep Space*'s slightly arch, less-than-horrific mood largely mitigates the possibility of viewer startle, a mood best exemplified by a one-liner Napier utters to his partner before squaring off with the film's threat: "I'm going to kick a little monster ass."

If tone is crucial to spectator fear, what other factors impinge on spectator surprise?

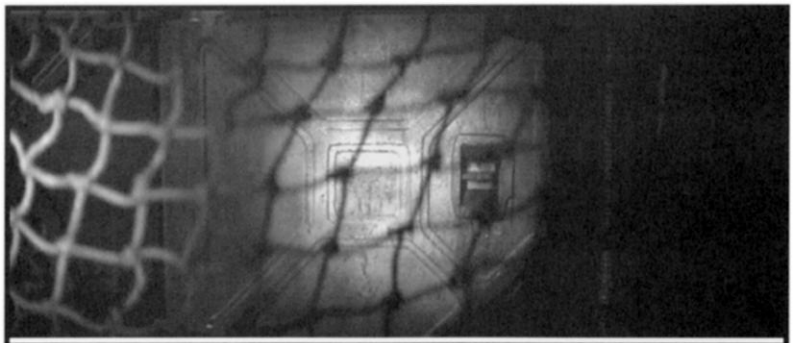
Nearly all viewers know that horror and thriller films might contain startle effects. How, then, can they be surprised by effects they know are coming? I suggest that the mind monitors space (including representational—film space) for the location, identity, and status of nearby objects. Similarly, Robin Horton proposes a "primary theory" of human cognition that transcends culture and is based, in part, on a continual need to make "two major distinctions . . . between human beings and other objects; and . . . between self and other."[16] There is an obvious utility to monitoring the flux of proximate objects, of which none are completely stable, predictable, safe. Location constantly evolves relative to a perceiver. Identity can change in the most fundamental ways: the living die; the dead move; the limb becomes a snake, the friend a murderer. The state of objects is in constant flux: the fixed breaks away and falls; the tumbling projectile comes to rest; life rots. Meanwhile, conscious attention is preoccupied with narrow and new concerns. Would consciousness be capable of deactivating such essential survival cognitions simply by recognizing the virtuality of a nearby space? Not likely, say Bryon Reeves and Clifford Nass, who argue in *The Media Equation: How People Treat Computers, Television, and New Media Like Real People and Places* that

> Modern media now engage old brains. People can't always overcome the powerful assumption that mediated presentations are actual people and objects. There is no switch in the brain that can be thrown to distinguish the real and mediated worlds. People respond to simulations of social actors and natural objects as if they were in fact social, and in fact natural.[17]

It seems an obstinate and defensive rationalism that would deny our experience of film space and film objects any of the phenomenological depth we bring to reality.

One last startle from *Alien* might help with an analysis of viewer surprise as a microsecond phenomenon. After Kane (John Hurt) dies from the violent birth of the infant alien, Ripley, Parker (Harry Dean Stanton), and Brett (Yaphet Kotto) go searching for the beast in the massive *Nostromo*. The search party carries a light, a large net, a six-foot electric prod, and a jerry-rigged sensor. The mise-en-scène is classic dungeon darkness and gothic gloom, the literal bowels of this massive ore-mining ship. Following the readings from her motion-tracker, Ripley stops before a row of squat metal lockers. She whispers to her hunting partners, "Parker, Brett, it's in this locker." The three prepare to open the locker door, and Ripley even gives a countdown: "All right, Parker, when I say . . . right now." From a low-angle three-shot of the tense crew members, the startle effect is timed to a shock cut of an extreme close-up of Jonesey the cat, mouth agape, scratching and shrieking inside the locker; a reaction shot of the three crew members quickly follows: they are jerking downward, attempting to capture the terrified cat, which Brett lets go because "It is only a cat." The sound burst that contributes to this startle effect is synchronous with the shock cut of Jonesey and is a symphony of discordant overlapping sound effects: cat screeches, metal hinge movements, clatter of equipment, actor exclamations. Although completely telegraphed, and the oldest trick in the book (the cat-in-the-closet routine parodied by Reiner), the startle is powerfully affective. The conclusion we can draw, once again, is that conscious reason and a familiarity with genre conventions are poor methods for defusing the involuntary startle response system, a system keyed to *momentary* disturbances. Indeed, this cat-in-the-box scene should be no general or global surprise coming, as it does as the eleventh threat scene in *Alien* and as the eighth startle.

How does surprise empower *Alien*'s Jonesey startle? Although first-time viewers could have anticipated the locker opening as a likely startle moment, they would have been in suspense over the outcome of this upcoming startle effect: Will the locker be empty or contain something? Will the something be dangerous or benign? If dangerous, what will the threat do to the

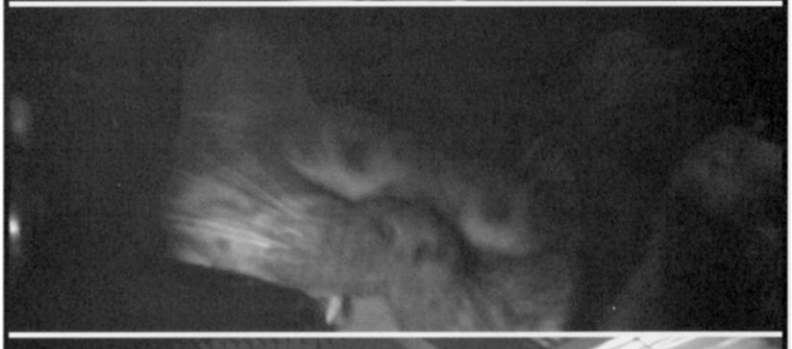


Alien:

The motion-tracker indicates something moving inside the locker.

Ripley, Brett, and Parker inch closer.

The cat reacts in a frenzy of movement.



Ripley, Brett, and Parker startle in unison.

crew members? Comparing affectively charged startle effects with weaker ones exposes how the weaker effects may develop too slowly to surprise competent adult viewers. Sticking with the example at hand, first-time viewers very likely are surprised by the intensity of the visual and auditory stimulus of the Jonesey startle. The shots preceding the shock cut of Jonesey range from 30 to 5 seconds—the shock cut is only about 1 second. The viewer's overall sense of a scene's speed is effected by cutting rate as well as the degree and type of movement of objects within the frame. In her shock cut, Jonesey is literally in a frenzy of motion—her movements, for a first-time viewer, would almost resist coherent cognition, a bit of perceptual overload accentuated by the extremes of the shot scale: we see only the cat's head and forepaws. Also, at this point in the narrative, first time viewers are unsure of the ontology of the rapidly evolving alien organism—it might become anything. This surprising visual sensation of Jonesey is coupled with auditory surprises. As I noted, the sound burst for this startle is a complex composite of various sounds, all of which, presented quickly, register, but as a phenomenal bit of caterwauling, made the more surprising by the preceding sound level that was set quite low.[18]

Implications of Startle for Theory

A number of studies support the finding that "the vigor of the startle reflex varies systematically with an organism's emotional state . . . [specifically] the startle response (an aversive reflex) is enhanced during a fear state and is diminished in a pleasant emotional context." Researchers have come to this conclusion through the method of showing subjects slides (that is, representations) previously classified as pleasant, neutral, and unpleasant,

> pictures of violent death, snakes, bloody wounds or burns, disasters, aimed guns, medical injection, and angry, destitute, or starving people; neutral slides were generally common household objects, such as a hairdryer, a book, and shoes; positively valent pictures included opposite-sex nudes, romantic couples, babies, cuddly animals, sports scenes, and appetizing food.[19]

Subjects are then startled with sound and light bursts while viewing images from each of the three categories. Amazingly, startles are not only strongest to negative images, but also weakest to positive images, with neutral images falling between negative and positive, a correlation that is "independent of measures of orienting, arousal, and interest in the materials."[20] Some researchers hold that positive images *inhibit* the basic level of startle response.

Other experiments have shown startle amplification even without slides or video images while subjects recall and imagine negative-rated *sentences*, such as: "I tense as THE NURSE SLOWLY INJECTS THE SHARP NEEDLE INTO MY UPPER ARM, and beads of sweat cover my forehead." And, similarly, positive-rated sentences—"I AM RELAXING on my living room couch LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW ON A SUNNY AUTUMN DAY"—lead to less powerful startle blinks than either negative or neutral sentence imagery.[21] The significance of this study should not be lost on humanists, nor rejected out-of-hand by those threatened by scientism or the wires and electrodes of experimental psychology. What is being exposed here is the power of the imagination, its capacity for visualization, and a linkage to affect that bypasses conscious reason.

In a major synthesis of theories of film spectatorship, Judith Mayne argues that much of film theory stems from two equally "extreme positions"—either a version of "apparatus" theory in which the viewer is seen as fully determined by the narrative film, or a reconsideration that sees viewers as active and resisting consumers of films. For example, Mayne contrasts Raymond Bellour and the *Camera Obscura* approach with Stuart Hall and cultural studies theorists like John Fiske. To Mayne,

> Both positions ascribe an unqualified power to the text, on the one hand, and socially defined readers/viewers on the other. The problem in each case is that the activity of making meaning is assumed to reside in one single source—either the cinematic apparatus, or the socially contextualized viewer. To be sure, variations are allowed in either case, but they are never significant enough to challenge the basic determinism of the model in question.[22]

All the significant theories of film studies rest, ultimately, on simple models of causality, where a single agent serves as *the* determining force, whether the artist of auteurism, the patriarchy of feminism, the art object of formalism, the basic mental operations of cognitive psychology, the capitalism of Marxist theory, or the psychological conflict between desire and control at

the center of Freudianism. As writers and readers we quite easily reduce 300-page books and entire careers to a "basic determinism," an expression of causality as simple as *this causes that*. Even nuanced works that explore dynamic, multi-causal relationships ultimately endow one agent as the primary causal force.

Startle is highly significant in this context. On first glance it appears an outstanding example of a biologically determined, universal effect, with little to do with culture, capitalism, or media apparatus. Not surprisingly, in *Post-Theory*, Noël Carroll uses startle to challenge the contemporary theoretical assumption "that *every* level of cinematic reception is fraught with political and ideological repercussions." Carroll argues:

> . . . it strikes me as incontrovertible that filmmakers often play upon what psychologists call the "startle response," an innate human tendency to "jump" at loud noises and to recoil at fast movements. This tendency is, as they say, impenetrable to belief; that is, our beliefs won't change the response. It is hardwired and involuntary. Awareness of this response enables theorists like me to explain the presence of certain audiovisual patterns and effects in horror films, without reference to politics and ideology. Indeed, insofar as the startle response is impenetrable to belief, it could be said to be, in certain respects, beyond politics and ideology. Moreover, such examples indicate that there is a stratum of theoretical investigation at the level of cognitive architecture that can proceed while bracketing questions of ideology.[23]

Similarly, David Bordwell argues that certain film effects such as startle are not utterly arbitrary and socially constructed, but are—adapting Ernst Gombrich—"sensory triggers"[24] that are more indebted to nature than effects which rely on higher, socialized forms of learning.

The powerful biological determinism of startle (its *hardwired* status) is clear from Landis and Hunt's studies in the 1930s. Using high-speed cinematography, the two psychologists recorded New York City policemen training at the firing range: "Every subject showed an eyelid response to every shot. No matter how familiar the men were with revolver practice, no matter how well trained they were, the lid reflex was present in every case" (*The Startle Pattern*, 36-7). Marksmen, of course, do not want to startle while carefully aiming: "The men were not conscious of the blinking, head movement, and facial response and in a few cases emphatically denied the possibility of such a response. Convinced only by a demonstration of the film, they were quite surprised to find that they 'made faces' when the revolver was fired, despite their years of training" (*The Startle Pattern*, 37).

But startle is much more complex and interesting than *dumb*, hardwired reflexes like the sneeze and the knee-jerk. Even Landis and Hunt, who recognized and described a general startle *pattern*, noticed that no two startle responses were exactly alike. The nearer the onset of the original response (speaking of microseconds), the more innate, "hard-wired" the response; conversely, the further from onset, the more learning, context, and personality influenced behavior.

Ronald Simons, one of the few to write a book-length study of startle, holds that startle "is determined by a host of social and cultural factors specific to the ongoing life of the individual affected."[25] Beyond individual variation in startle, Simons describes a curious Indonesian syndrome called *latah*, where a minority of individuals in that culture exhibit, upon being startled, "violent body movements; assumption of habitual defensive postures; striking out; throwing or dropping held objects; shouting; repeating of words just said, thought, or attended to; naughty talk" (233). Similar culture-based responses by those unusually sensitive to startles, dubbed hyperstartlers, have been found around the world, in Japan, the United States, Siberia, Sweden, Thailand, Yemen, and the Philippines. Simon rejects cultural relativist theories that seek to explain *latah* as solely a Malaysian cultural result. Simons holds, and I believe he's right, that *latah* and its cousins are founded on the universal startle response, but that particular cultures offer more or less fertile conditions for transforming this response into unique social practices.

In the last century, theorists of one camp or another have sought to enshrine *nature* or *nurture* as the dominant, even singular, determining force of human activity. The nature/nurture opposition, unfortunately, is the most ubiquitous and vigilantly defended either/or fallacy of our age. In seeking to balance film studies' widespread embrace of social determinism at the expense of nature, David Bordwell reminds: "It is perfectly possible for a phenomenon to be culturally constructed and at the same time to be very widespread, or even universal, among human societies."[26] Startle, at first glance an outstanding instance of genetic determinism, becomes, with a second glance, a rich instance of cultural and personal elaboration. Eschewing foolish consistency, startle is at once genetically hard-wired,

socially constructed, and personally expressed. Echoing this point, British clinical psychologists Robert Howard and Rodney Ford note that a century of study confirms the belief that startle is a "universal physiological phenomenon consisting of an initial rapid involuntary phase and a secondary phase which is under some degree of voluntary control."[27]

A film-based startle is a highly localized and pregnant example of the contradictions of cinema: of the muddle of nature and nurture, of the generic form and personal psychology. Any attempt to simplify this event is a hobgoblin born of selective infatuation with only one aspect of a parallel, pluralistic mind. Poststructuralist theory recognizes those deterministic perceptual and emotional functions that *are* beyond our direct, conscious guidance, but then enshrines them as the only psychological processes that matter. Unfortunately, as Mayne well notes, counter theories, whether from cultural studies or cognitive science, frequently assert viewer activity at the expense of film's active role in determining affect and thought. Mayne cautions that spectator "activity can be just as vapid and indistinct a term as 'passivity'" (159).

Startles show that *part* of the mind works from an ontological naiveté embarrassing to the rational intellect. "Part of the mind" is a crude way of saying that film-based startles are characteristic of a mind functioning in a massively parallel, modular process. The popular folk model of the mind assumes a division of mental faculties. Academically this folk insight has been channeled through either a variation of psychoanalysis (split classically between Id, Ego, Superego) or, more recently, through a type of cognitive parallelism or modularity.

Eddy Zemach has recently employed this divided-mind foundation to rebut Kendall Walton's famous "pretend" theory of aesthetic response.[28] Zemach argues that fear and pity derived from narratives are not "quasi" emotions, but the real thing, although mitigated by a *rational* reader/viewer who maintains separate mental "dossiers," one of which, a "dominant" one, asserts its rational awareness of fictionality. Although we may fear the green slimes of film, and pity the Anna Kareninas of fiction, we do not *act* on these emotions: "For rational adults, emotion is never a cause of action; rather, it gives one a reason to act in a certain way. Reasons are weighed against other reasons: they are defeasible, so emotion need not lead to action" (43).

Regarding the startle response: viewers can be startled by film sound and motion in part because the systems that immediately attempt to judge sound and visual motion make no distinction between real and apparent motion, or real and amplified sound.[29] Films can manipulate us, in part, by actually manipulating our environments, constructing energy fields we take, before reason, to be extensions of the physical world.

Who's Afraid of Surprises

Startle has probably been neglected, to some extent, because no theory has given us the framework with which to view it as emblematic of something important about viewer psychology. In addition, startle may seem to most humanities-trained film scholars a subject of study reserved for social scientists and psychologists. But it is certainly more than a curio. As a humanities-trained film scholar, I *don't* recommend our field begin conducting laboratory experiments (although it would certainly be useful to consult with those developing experiments that focus on film and media). However, if we continue to neglect the recent, amazing work in the social sciences and cognitive psychology that relates to and informs our concerns with media effects, we will maintain an insular and comfortable ignorance and fail both our individual curiosities and our collective responsibility to contribute toward intellectual discovery.

Who's afraid of startles? I can playfully speculate. Poststructuralists might not fear startle specifically, but they are decidedly troubled with the larger concepts startle necessarily implies: biology, anthropological universals, and evolutionary adaptation that cannot be, in the end, fully dissolved or transformed in Culture. New cognitive rationalists and traditionalists might fear startle because it is, to a large degree, patently deterministic, an irrational expression of the mind that cannot be, in the end, reduced to free, conscious agency. Startle slept through the Enlightenment. For non-academics (most film reviewers and other journalistic guardians of the public good), startles are the ultimate form of sensationalism, artlessness, and mindlessness. The only groups not afraid of startle appear to be film viewers and makers, whose appreciation of the effect remains strong after 50 years. Why have startle effects become a common feature of the horror and thriller film genres? The *why* question is more difficult and diffuse than *how* startles can occur in film spectators. My own conclusion, not at all original, is that startles prove to us, in the very maw of virtual death, how very much alive we are. Much like the genres they are found in, startles engage our primitive psychophysiologies, and, for an hour or so, mock and remember mortality. Perhaps, too, in revealing what we do not *actively* con-

trol of our psychology, startle effects reaffirm the animalistic, the atavistic, and the irrational expressions which the horror and thriller genres have long exposed beneath decorum, utopianism, and reason.

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Notes

1. According to the classic study carried out by Carney Landis and William A. Hunt—*The Startle Pattern*, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939)—the startle response consists of "the blinking of the eyes, head movement forward, a characteristic facial expression, raising and drawing forward of the shoulders, abduction of the upper arms, bending of the elbows, pronation of the lower arms, flexion of the fingers, forward movement of the trunk, contraction of the abdomen, and bending of the knees" (21). All of which may transpire in 0.3 to 1.5 seconds (*SP*, p. 31). Not all startle responses involve the full complement of physical reactions. At base, startle consists of the core features of the eye blink, the head movement forward, and the facial grimace.
2. In the same vein, Jenefer Robinson proposes that the startle effect can serve as a "model of emotional response" which "helps us understand the structure and function of emotional response in general" (54). Reversing philosophy's infatuation with highly conscious and refined emotions, Robinson argues that any emotional response can be seen as an elaboration of the startle dynamic, "as a response that focuses our attention on (makes salient) and registers as significant to the goals (wants, motives) of the organism something in the perceived (remembered, imagined) environment" (62): "Startle" in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 92:2 (1995), 53–74.
3. David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 31–2.
4. David Bartholomew, "The Horror Film," in *The Political Companion to American Film*, ed. Gary Crowdus (New York: Lake View Press, 1994), 205.
5. Dennis Fischer, *Horror Film Directors*, 1931–1990 (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991), 666.
6. David J. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula, From Novel to Stage to Screen* (London: W.W. Norton, 1990), 73–4.
7. David J. Skal, Dracula: *The Ultimate Illustrated Edition of the World-Famous Vampire Play* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 74.
8. Lewton's horror films are, in descending order, based on total number of startle effects: *The Seventh Victim* (8 startles); *The Leopard Man* (1943; 4 startles); *Bedlam* (1946; 4 startles); *Cat People* (2 startles); *The Body Snatcher* (1945; 1 startle); *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943; 1 startle); *Curse of the Cat People* (1944; 1 startle); *Isle of the Dead* (1945; 1 startle). *Ghost Ship*, Lewton's only other horror film, has long been out of circulation due to its contested authorship; reviews and plot descriptions of the rather sensational tale suggest, however, that the film contains startles. According to Edmund G. Bansak's *Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 1995), Lewton apparently got feedback from his first bus effect in *Cat People*: "When Lewton attended a sneak preview audience for the film, he sat in the back and witnessed an entire audience jumping in unison at the appropriate time" (133).
9. Pages 124–25 from Joel E. Siegel, *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror* (New York: Viking, 1973).
10. Playing the game of "cinematic firsts" is a bit dangerous, given how little of early cinema and records of early cinema spectatorship survive. I am certain that viewers were occasionally startled by films before Lewton's work at RKO. For instance, a very few horror films of the 1930s (*The Mummy* [1932] and *Island of Lost Souls* [1933]) offer scenes where characters act startled by threats in contexts that might have made some viewers responsive. Even silent film might have startled viewers, especially since much of it was accompanied by in-house music and effects. Beyond these caveats, it remains that the early films I am familiar with seem to lack the formal manipulations—shock cuts, tight framing, close-up reaction shots, intense sound modulations, and rapid visual movement—which Lewton first employed. My point, then, is that Lewton formalized, even institutionalized, the startle for horror and thriller film in 1942 with his *Cat People*.
11. Stanley J. Solomon, *Beyond Formula: American Film Genres* (New York: Harcourt,Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), 112. The strength and persistence of the condemnation of startle effects can be seen in the defensive comments of some threat scene directors. On the Criterion edition laserdisc commentary for *Halloween* (1978), John Carpenter three times comments on startle effects in a dismissive manner: "You're about to hear one of my musical stings that permeate the movie, I would say rather crassly but effectively." Later, he characterizes his use of false startles based on breaking glass and a ringing telephone as, respectively, a "cheap trick" and a "kind of cheeseball trick." While this self-criticism of startle might play well under the bright lights of academic and critical analysis, it does not lead, apparently, to any renunciation of the effect. More than a decade after *Halloween*, Carpenter's *In the Mouth of Madness* (1995) includes even more startle effects than does his *Halloween*. Indeed, the sound track for *Madness* betrays a veritable celebration of the sonic aspects of startle, employing intense and discordant sound bursts as loud and dynamic as any. The profits of this cheap trick apparently exceed the cost of any critical tax levied against it.
12. Some rare and intriguing deviations do exist. See *The Hidden* (1987) for a threat scene where a dog serves in the identificatory protagonist position of a startle effect. Filmed at a dog's-eye level, a cute mutt approaches a female stripper who has just fallen to her death in an alley. The corpse's eyes (an alien life form occupies her body) pop open (startle cue) and the alien/stripper lunges for the dog. The obvious implication, proven by countless outings by Lassie and Rin Tin Tin, is that humans can strongly identify with dogs and other domesticated animals.

13. A *true* threat is not necessary to generate a startle response. What is needed is only the possibility of a threat, the intimation of something dangerous offscreen. In fact, in many instances the offscreen "threat" turns out to be comically unintimidating: a ringing telephone in *The Exorcist*; a cuckoo clock striking the top of the hour in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956); the ubiquitous domesticated feline (Jonesey the cat, twice used as a false startle in *Alien*); the ever watchful guard dog (*The Seventh Victim*, *Candyman* [1992], *The Hills Have Eyes* [1978], *The Howling* [1980]). Other animals that have been enlisted for false threats: an owl in *Cat People* (1982), an excited baboon in *The Fly* (1986), a bird in *I Walked with a Zombie*, a leopard in *The Leopard Man*, a raccoon in *The Client*, a squirrel in *Species* (1995), and, my favorite, a little bunny in *The Spiral Staircase* (1946). Besides the extensive catalogue of false startles based on flora and fauna (a tumbleweed in *The Leopard Man*), there is the widely used example of the friendly blindside startle, the old tap-on-the-shoulder routine (*The Exorcist*, *Jaws*, *Halloween*, *The Blob* [1988], *Aliens*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1978], *Fatal Attraction* [1987], *Knight Moves* [1992]). Notice that most false startles are dominated by anthropocentrically significant agents: humans and animals. These categories are, of course, potentially threatening in ways vegetable and mineral are not.
14. Robert Plutchik, "Emotions: A General Psychoevolutionary Theory," in *Approaches to Emotion*, ed. Klaus R. Scherer and Paul Ekman (Hillsdale, N.J: L. Erlbaum, 1984), 209.
15. This back-and-forth movement between jokey and frightening threat scenes can be seen in films like *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Howling*, *Re-Animator* (1985), and *Army of Darkness* (1993).
16. Robin Horton, "Tradition and Modernity Revisited," in *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 201–60. Horton's primary theory is also quoted in Bordwell's essay "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 92.
17. *The Media Equation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12.
18. Most startle effects rely on a sound *bump*, a sudden burst of sound effects, dialogue, and/or music. While many startle effects rely on symphonic bursts of sound, a few single element sound bursts can be heard, like the powerful foley bump at the end of *The Stepford Wives* (1975). Katharine Ross slowly climbs the stairs in her own home, searching for her children, believing her husband to be conspiring with the local Men's Club to manufacture better women, and is startled by her husband (foley burst) who has snuck up behind her. Music, ominous and discordant, unquestionably contributes to the fear state that prepares the way for startle responses: Bernard Herrmann's *Psycho*-shower screeches, John Williams' shark motif from *Jaws*, "Tubular Bells" from *The Exorcist*. But music can do more than set the mood. It can serve as the primary or sole auditory stimulus for startle. A massive symphonic music burst in Roger Corman's *House of Usher* (1960) heralds Vincent Price's unexpected entry into the film. In *Repulsion*, Polanski uses a solo music burst in a startle effect that turns on the discovery of a skinned rabbit corpse inside Deneuve's handbag. While startle effects obviously depend on the sheer loudness of sound bursts, I suspect that the inchoate, disharmony of many sound effects (exploited by odd instruments and synthetic sound combinations) stimulates anxiety in viewers who are attempting to maintain some sense of and orientation to a film's aural setting.
19. Pages 377, 382, in Peter J. Lang, Margaret M. Bradley, and Bruce N. Cuthbert, "Emotion, Attention, and the Startle Reflex," *Psychological Review* 97:3 (1990), 377–95.
20. Page 487 from Scott R. Vrana, Ellen L. Spence, and Peter J. Lang, "The Startle Probe Response: A New Measure of Emotion?," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 97:4 (1988), 487–91.
21. See Scott R. Vrana and Peter J. Lang, "Fear Imagery and the Startle-Probe Reflex," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 99:2 (1990), 189–97, and, from note 19 above, "EASR," 386–87.
22. Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 94.
23. See page 50 of Carroll's "Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment," in *Post-Theory*.
24. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 146–91.
25. See page 14, *Boo! Culture, Experience, and the Startle Reflex*, by Ronald C. Simons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
26. See page 104, "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision," in *Post-Theory*.
27. Robert Howard and Rodney Ford, "From the Jumping Frenchmen of Maine to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: The Startle Response in Neuropsychiatry," *Psychological Medicine* 22 (1992), 695–707.
28. Eddy M. Zemach, "Emotion and Fictional Beings," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54:1 (Winter 1996), 41–8.
29. For compelling arguments that basic perception cannot distinguish between real and apparent motion, see the work of Joseph and Barbara Anderson: "Between Veridicality and Illusion," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 6.2 (Spring 1992), 173–82; "A Cognitive Approach to Continuity," *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 13.1 (Fall 1993), 61–6; "The Myth of Persistence of Vision," *Journal of the University Film and Video Association* 30.4 (Fall 1978), 3–8; "The Myth of Persistence of Vision Revisited," *Journal of Film and Video* 45.1 (Spring 1993), 3–12.

Martha P. Nochimson

Ally McBeal

Brightness Falls from the Air

On September 8, 1997, when David E. Kelley's sitcom "Ally McBeal" premiered, it far exceeded the competence of mass media television discourse, which is still, for the most part, stuck ruminating over narrative composition within the Aristotelian framework of beginning, middle, and end, looking for harmonious relationships among parts and whole, and asking for a point of view provided by a protagonist-norm suitable for audience identification. This approach, generally inadequate for discussing the tensions in finite film narratives, is even less relevant to serial television. Continuing television narrative, which disturbs the beginning- middle-and-end paradigm, is *potentially* most fulfilled as a comparatively open range of possibilities. As it turned out, the Aristotelian mode was especially fruitless for the early "Ally" episodes, which were not only potentially an open narrative system, but *actually* used the serial form with a remarkable, perhaps unique, vision of multiple levels of reality burgeoning in the individual universes of each of its characters. Kelley, a former lawyer who had already created for the home screen a number of somewhat unconventional television offerings, "Picket Fences," "Chicago Hope," and "The Practice," seemed, at the age of 39, to have made a breakthrough into a truly landmark creation. However, conventional criticism became more relevant by its second mid-season, for by January 1999, the show had regressed, suddenly returning to the unidimensional range of normality typical of early sitcoms.

By its third season premier in October 1999, the show had dropped even further away from its auspicious beginning. It had so far elevated a clichéd normality that interior fantasies were represented as not only deviant but decidedly degenerate at that. Beginning as a brilliant, complicated representation of the shifting borders between equally important and valid inner and outer realities portrayed by a felicitously varied and exciting company of actors, "Ally McBeal" has become an embarrassment to itself and its creative team. Its history is a sobering lesson for anyone who still believes that a good show will eventually find its audience, given enough time, under what passes for a free market system in the American media.

At its best, "Ally McBeal" represented a universe structured as a cubistic suspension of many conflicting planes of existence as it chronicled the manic vicissitudes of Ally (Calista Flockhart) and the cohorts of a Boston law firm, Cage/Fish & Associates, headed by senior partners John Cage (Peter McNicol) and Richard Fish (Greg Germann). The dazzle of its initial 18 months was partially a function of its daring mode of characterization. None of the characters obeyed Aristotelian rules of consistency, each one being represented as a tension between paradoxically different inner and outer realities. Thus within the Cage/Fish milieu, personal

relations at their most intriguing were always bundles of potentialities, some of which conformed to essentialist ideas of normality, others of which deconstructed essentialist norms. In the course of the initial episodes, Ally, Cage, and Fish reflected perceptively on themselves, always reaching introspective impasses at the spectacle of their incommensurabilities, as did their fellow lawyers Georgia and Billy Thomas (Courtney Thorne-Smith and Gil Bellows), a seemingly conventional TV married couple; Nelle Porter (Portia de Rossi), a lawyer who combines Rapunzel-length blonde tresses with the instincts of a killer shark; and aggressively sexually promiscuous office manager Elaine Vassal (Jane Krakowski). Suitably, these manifold characters moved among a variety of fluid spaces in an external reality just as ambiguous and nuanced as their inner lives. Identification of the spaces in Cage/Fish's fashionable but maze-like suite, where all offices look alike, was an imaginative challenge for the viewer. The most clearly defined space in the suite was the unisex toilet/washroom, which brought other challenges to "normal" parameters: within its confines men and women alike entered into, lurked behind, and exited from adjoining stalls with the syncopation of characters in some unexpected hybrid of postmodernism and French farce.

The "Ally" courtroom, which *was* informed by spatial definition, blurred other boundaries as lawyers and clients lost the lines separating personal, professional, and legal. Inner realities erupted into the external proceedings through delightfully farcical images and sounds which the audience (but usually not the other characters) could see and hear. Even purportedly naturalistic courtroom behavior comically slid over appropriate limits, as Judge Jennifer "Whipper" Cone (Dyan Cannon) redefined conflict of interest in ways that permitted her to sit in judgment on cases argued by Richard Fish, her one-time lover; and Judge Dennis "Happy" Boyle (the late Phil Leeds) inevitably interrupted the proceedings in his courtroom to examine the teeth of lawyers, plaintiffs, and defendants.

As the nominal pivot of the show, Ally brought home the asymmetricality that animated Cage/Fish by anchoring the audience far from the stabilizing, traditional normative sitcom point of view. Ally anchored the viewer in her confusion, her need to sort through a range of implications for human personality and desire in a world of infinite shift. Ally's role involved her heroic attempts to negotiate slippage with those conventional tools of civilization: creating distinctions and enforcing limits. Sisyphus-like, she watched while her educated attempts at distinctions and limits crashed and burned. Her goals and failures underlined the central truth of Ally's world: here The Law was constantly on the minds of the characters and the audience, but the solidity it connotes in the meliorist narratives of "Perry Mason," "Matlock," and the narratively inconclusive but fundamentally essentialist "Law and Order" thinned out into the most fragile of all human inventions, less a solid foundation and more an ineffable phantom.

Thus when the series pulsed with originality, it took its roots from previous variations on the workbuddy (my term) subgenre of the genus sitcom to which "Ally" belongs, but pushed forward its tendency toward complexity. In the workbuddy subgenre, there has traditionally been, as there is in "Ally," a focus on the interconnecting lives of a group of professionally linked people that approximates the cohesion of a family despite the absence of actual blood ties. When "Ally" made room for radical indeterminacy and when it denaturalized familiar conventions, it seemed to dynamite its forebears, and yet its very subversions can also, paradoxically, be seen to reveal a subterranean element that has always lurked below the workbuddy serial's surface. Casting a light backward, the early "Ally" can be seen as the kind of liberation toward which the workbuddy form has been moving all along.

Even at its inception, the workbuddy subgenre made more room for multiple realities than the older domestic sitcom. Way back in 1952, the first television workbuddy shows, "Our Miss Brooks" and "Mr. Peepers," had already mildly challenged the certainties of the domestic sitcom, within which there exist plot and character enzymes formidable enough to break down any invasive intimations of implacable isolation, injustice, or existential terror. Later workbuddy shows opened the breech further. "The Mary Tyler Moore Show"(1970–77), "M*A*S*H"(1972–83), "Taxi" (1978–83), "Cheers" (1982–93), and "Moonlighting" (1985–89) allowed in varying degrees for the existence of irrevocable tensions, irreconcilable differences, and even nothingness. "Dream On" (1990–1996) and "Herman's Head" (1991–1994) made further strides, but though these shows give more play to the inner fantasy life in the subgenre than ever before, they restricted it to a manageable single deviation from a clearly demarcated normal reality. Coming on the scene in 1997, "Ally" can be seen as the fulfillment of the promise of the workbuddy, infused as it was by the energies of experiments in multi-level reality television most brilliantly conducted by David Lynch ("Twin Peaks") and Dennis Potter ("The Singing Detective," *Pennies from Heaven*, et al.). The fin-de-siècle boldness of "Ally" pushed the limits in a manner that recalls both

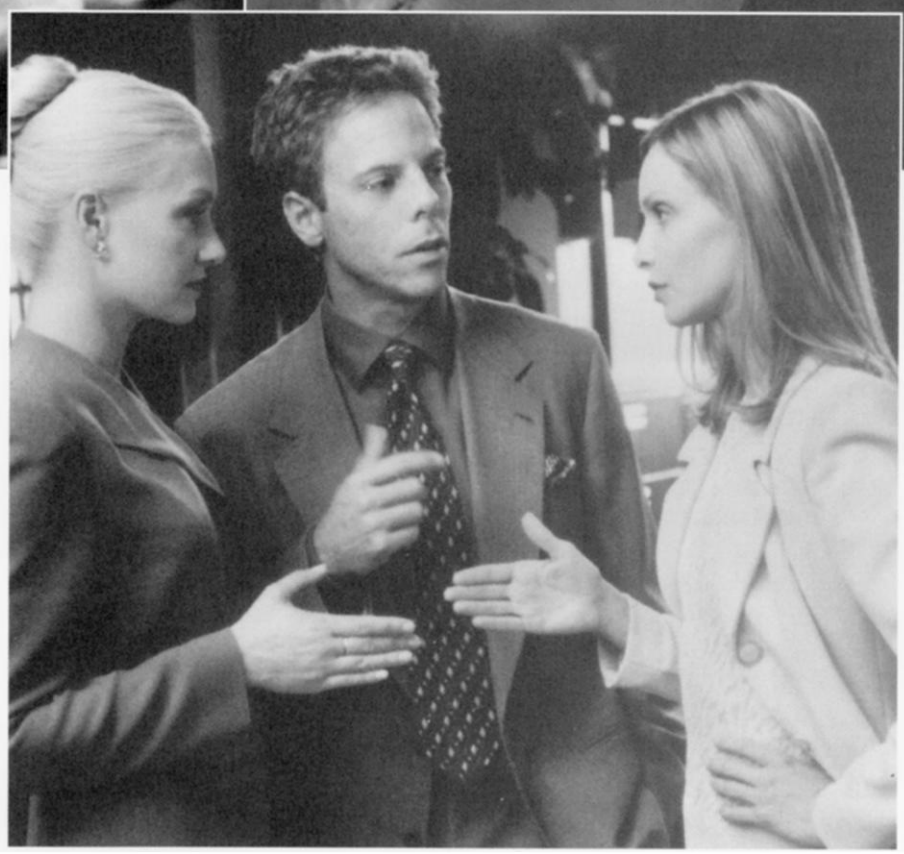
Lynch's and Potter's ambiguous representations of communities of inner worlds sliding enigmatically between dreams and naturalistically represented experience.

In that spirit, initially, "Ally McBeal" laughingly refused to rescue us from a world of loneliness and impossible contradictions, while also (hilariously) troubling naturalistic narrative representation. Structurally, each "Ally" episode began as if it were going to be a conventionally plot-driven show, only to be derailed when the humor on the show, with its intensity of radical and abrupt slippages, refused to resolve conflict to the expected single perspective point of view. On "Ally" at its best, words and situations turned representation wrong side out and back again so that it was impossible to attain any kind of seamless view. For example, self-serving Richard Fish, as slippery as his name suggests, could have become "Ally's" Ted, the butt of jokes on the "Mary Tyler Moore" show from whom we remained aloof, a foil to the sympathetic protagonist, Mary, whose point of view defined the show's *actual* reality. However, in the early "Ally" episodes, there was nothing as simple and falsely reassuring as a single true state of things. Rather, Fish's repeated, dizzying intellectual pratfalls kept us constantly in touch with his self-awareness of his own moronic behavior, and therefore created a partial form of identification.

One typical example occurred when he casually brushed away Ally and Nelle's objections to defending one Harold Wicks (Wayne Newton), a "shock jock" à la Howard Stern, who routinely degraded women on his show. Fish's summary order that they take the case culminated in his babbling incoherence about this wonderful opportunity to simultaneously "raise profile and erode the First Amendment," leaving both Ally and Nelle stunned at the chasm among their individual perceptions of "the way it is." His sophomoric waffling might have rendered Fish a cartoon, were it not for Greg Germann's brilliant representation of Fish's multiple levels of awareness: his astonishment at his unscrupulously manic determination to do business coupled with a shrugging resignation to the permanence of his sleaze factor, and a tendency to try to outrun his own weasel-like mind. Thus, even though Fish was far from a normative workbuddy protagonist, and far from the anchoring character of Ally, he engaged us in his impossible behavior.

But the "Ally" situation was not restricted to surprising us by brief identifications with an offbeat, or even base, point of view. Its most exciting moments occurred when all normative perspectives were shaken. Thus the above-mentioned Harold Wicks case, with its allusion to familiar trash radio and its somewhat predictable treatment of the paradoxes of freedom of speech, only begins to define the "Ally" situation. More indicative of what "Ally McBeal" did to the workbuddy sitcom is the kind of case particular to Cage/Fish, one that begins in such grotesque absurdity that we prepare to write it off, only to find ourselves riveted by an unexpected sense of the complexity of the human condition, as in an episode entitled "These Are the Days." Here Cage/Fish elects to defend Alan Farmer (Willie Garson), a man who walks through public places with a "sawed-off paddle," thwacking only those people who appear to be happy. Initially, we identified with the outrage of the plaintiffs, innocently sitting with companions only to be rudely startled by a painful jolt. Farmer, however, earnestly insisted that he was doing a public service, that he was a modern-day Cupid who saw, in these happy people, lovers who were ready for commitment but needed to be jump started; he believed that in our emotionally stalled society there was no one to do the job but him. Over the top! Yet, as the show plumbed Farmer's motivations, primarily through the defense mounted by John Cage, there were a few terrifying moments when it was impossible to separate Cage's comic sophistry (his account of his mother's wisdom about love knocking us on the head) from the way his defense contextualized Farmer's attempt to "play Cupid" within the lonely, ambiguous world of the show in which we were immersed. We were beset by a previously inconceivable counterpoint between the absolutely *necessary* law that ultimately rendered the paddler guilty and the piercing truth behind his deviance that permitted competing audience identifications both with Farmer and with his victims/beneficiaries.

Certainly, in the first season, the "mad paddler" seemed to sum up the emotional situations of the principals at Cage/Fish. Ally particularly seemed to need a knock on the head with respect to one of the central ongoing personal dramas on the show: The Triangle. The Triangle was comprised of Ally and the lost love of her life, Billy Thomas, another lawyer at Cage/ Fish, and his wife, Georgia. Billy and Ally were childhood sweethearts who, we were incessantly told, were THAT close that they used to sniff each other's behinds and keep a phone line open at night to listen to each other's breathing. Billy's unexpected appearance in Ally's workplace was quickly followed by that of his lawyer wife, creating the Ally/Billy/Georgia triangle which was deeply embedded in the first 18 months of the show. The Triangle reversed the function of central sitcom relationships as indexes of normality, setting the scene for an interrogation of normality by depicting impossible interpersonal relations that never yield to any of



Above: Ally (Calista Flockhart, left) with Elaine (Jane Krakowski); Ally's Christmas performance (top right); Fish (Greg Germann) introduces Nelle Porter (Portia de Rossi) to a skeptical Ally (right).

the morality, common sense, and pyschobabble with which the characters, in their angst, try to dissolve it. Both seriously and humorously, the audience had to deal with the competition between Billy and Georgia's marriage, the show's only official, legally binding emotional commitment, and Billy and Ally's historic ties, possibly the show's *deepest*, if unofficial, emotional commitment.

While the Billy/Georgia marriage continually alluded to the domestic sitcom ideal through the actors's Ken-and-Barbie appearances, each episode humorously both evoked and defied the all-too-familiar cliché until we were simultaneously moved and appalled by it. One minute, Billy was the fabled sweet-natured boy-next-door who gives lessons to lesser men on how to be normal: he counseled anally retentive John Cage (a stuttering, repressed man with a passionate relationship to the unisex toilet bowl) and sleazy Richard Fish (whose lack of ethics is only surpassed by his crudity toward women). But then just around the corner was the story of Billy's cold-hearted betrayal of his childhood romance. Ally, like the audience, was shocked to discover that when Billy left Ally to go to Michigan University Law School saying that he was not leaving her—only Harvard Law School—he had already met Georgia during a pre-admission visit and was already planning to move toward marriage with her. This complexity was compounded when Billy seductively walked down memory lane with and even kissed our hapless heroine before returning to earnest bill-and-cooing with Georgia. Similarly, Mary Pickford-like Georgia oscillated between being the perfect American sweetheart/wife and negotiating the borders of hypocrisy as, under the pretext of fixing Ally up with an old boyfriend, she used the opportunity to get a "date high" from being with him because she felt nostalgic for this pre-marriage excitement. Under the cover of comic narrative ploys, Georgia would even slip into demi-same-sex eroticism with Ally (for example, a prolonged on-the-lips kiss with Ally purportedly intended to help Ally dump an annoyingly persistent suitor), as the two women seemed to seek in each other some way of exploring the discomforting undercurrents of Billy's mesmerizing banality.

The incommensurability of Ally and her Triangle was a synecdoche of the "Ally" universe; however, in many ways the "Ally" universe was even more powerfully and comically distilled in office manager Elaine Vassal, Jane Krakowsi's initially incandescent, multilayered creation that both defined and flouted the blonde floozy cliché, and in Elaine's relationship to Ally, which committed the ultimate violence on sitcom conventions by prohibiting the audience from continuously identifying empathetically with the heroine. If the complexities and multiple realities of The Triangle were part of the show's refusal to give Ally the ability to define a clear, normative value system for the show, they did preserve the usual audience empathy for a central character. Maybe she could not claim to explain to us what ought to be done in terms of The Triangle, but audience empathy was in her corner in the suffering the situation caused. But in Ally's relationship to Elaine, even that tenuous centering possibility disappeared when the show refused to honor old clichés about women, sexuality, and self-control which would have traded on the fear traditionally attached to (Elaine's) out-of-control sexuality and the reassurance traditionally attached to (Ally's) female reserve.

Sexually available to an almost terrifying degree, mannered in the best Monroe style of forced sex-bomb affability, Elaine, whose undisguised, deepest instincts impel her to invade any space and any domain, offered the spectre of all that is traditionally fearful about women. Elaine was at every keyhole behind which something of a personal nature took place. Elaine sat on the toilet with a tape recorder—legs up so she could not be spotted. Elaine literally announced everyone's personal business as if it were public information. She not only organized the yearly Christmas party in order to display her pneumatic body in the annual Christmas show (and Elaine can belt out a song with professional style), she also built the platform on which the show took place, adjusting her welding goggles, and lifting a foot fetishistically shod in red platform shoes to steady herself. On Ally's birthday, conflating herself with Ally, Elaine arranged for a male stripper to come to the office and unabashedly enjoyed the gyrating muscle man while Ally fled from the distasteful display.

Yet that quality of the "Ally" universe that at one time would not leave us with any of the comforting truisms of sitcom experience forbade us from writing Elaine off as a cartoon, and, indeed, the delicately intricate emotional confrontations between Ally and Elaine became more defining for this show than even the moments between Ally and Billy. That this feminine relationship was once given crucial importance suggests a valid reason why people wanted to talk about Ally as a feminist hero. However, looking at Ally as a role model was inappropriate in a show in which the feminism was located not in Ally, but between characters, in new relational paradigms. More important, because the dialogue between Ally's desire for control and Elaine's inherent fluidity took place between heterosexual women, the show challenged the classical,

gendered representation of structure and free flow in terms of male control/dominance and female emotionality/submission. The end of an episode called "Happy Birthday, Baby" is a telling example. In that episode, Elaine organized for Ally a birthday party that Ally made clear she didn't want. The highlight was a gyrating, self-promoting Elaine singing "I'm a Woman." The next evening, after work, Ally and Elaine stared at each other across a desk, Ally, with all logic on her side, venting her annoyance at what she, and the audience too, perceived as Elaine's narcissistic agenda. "Elaine," said Ally, anything but grateful for Elaine's "present" to her, "last night was the same as every night, every day. It's about you wanting to be noticed. . . . How long are you planning on keeping all this up?" An Elaine who had completely let down her customary mask of smirking sexuality took the verbal punch and replied with quite naked emotion, "Till I'm noticed."

The ensuing silence stopped Ally and the show dead in their tracks. The brilliance of this moment occurred because heroine Ally wasn't the voice of anything here, or even our empathetic point of identification, just a puzzled logical person facing exactly the same kind of uncertainty and doubt that passion-riddled Elaine faced. The profound truth of Elaine's needy secret projected her manifest offenses just a hair beyond the reach of common-sense condemnation. Yet when a wave of sympathy motivated Ally to invite Elaine to have supper with her and her best friend Renee (Lisa Nicole Carson), Elaine declined, saying, "Maybe next time," and thereby leaving a world of unresolvable issues shimmering beyond the reach of human compassion.

In Ally's universe, the cartoonlike simplicity that closed narratives usually inflict on sitcoms, against the grain of their open form, was left to the show's many digitally computerized cartoon effects—sexual interest digitally visualized as a character's tongue lengthened to the necessary yardage to lick the object of desire, thus, with the speed of the flash cut, making manifest socially invisible desires. Just as "Ally's" narratives, under pressure from competing perspectives, could not produce a unified angle of vision, so the cartoons on "Ally" not only represented disparate inner worlds, but also broke the naturalistic code of domestic sitcoms and reflexively reminded us that we were watching television.

The high standards that the early episodes attained made painful the episodes of early 1999, with their intimations of a downward spiral of entropy. The elements of the show remained, but in wrong relationship to each other; that is, a narrative style invaded the show that resolved or suppressed all tensions in the naturalistic mode of the oldest workbuddy shows. One ominously regressive episode concerned an unmarried, lonely high school teacher from Ally's past who, dying of cancer, wanted to be put into a coma by the hospital so that she could live in the dream life of ideal husband and family she had created for herself. The episode unequivocally endorsed the dying woman's inner life, but not as a fragment of reality. Instead, the endorsement created a Disney-like fall into sentimental illusion as a kind of escapist euphoria that lent credence to Puritanical critiques of fantasy as inferior "unrealistic" entertainment. Similarly, John Cage, who had been "coveting from afar"–his words–the beautiful Nelle, rejected his chance with her because he "recognized" his longing for her as nothing more than a fantasy; maturity dictated that the high-school beauty queen he could never date then could not now be his reality either. Here again, fantasy was reduced to an adjunct of rationalistic (essentialist) reality instead of taking its place as part of a multi-layered world of all kinds of realities. Pertinently, this falling-off was accompanied by the effacement of the energy centers of the early "Ally" universe: The Triangle—replaced in these entropic episodes by an interracial romance for Ally (photographed sentimentally in a bath of Disney-romance-light); and Elaine—not only marginalized but increasingly a cartoonlike girl toy.

Similarly disappointing was the irony of "Ally's" angry answer to Puritanical feminist denunciations of the show for not justifying its fantasy by providing useful Aesopian feminist lessons. In its retaliation against these reductionist demands, "Ally" lobotomized itself. Specifically, Ally dreamed she was being accosted by a bull-like cartoon of a feminist who told Ally that she was damn well going to be what They (the purported feminists) wanted her to be. Ally, literally, so went her dream logic, bit the woman's nose off, giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "on the nose." Despite its seeming audacity, this dream was a regressive element: clearly no new plane of reality, but a rebus-like restatement of David E. Kelley's outrage in formulaic Freudian clichés. In venting its anger, the show ironically started to resemble the old style sitcoms with which the mistaken critics had initially confused it.

Once "Ally" relegated most of human incongruity to hallucinatory fantasy and accepted a standard definition of normal human nature, the show slid further. During the February 1999 "sweeps," The Triangle was suddenly back, but completely essentialist in configuration. The audience was treated to a series of shows which—obsessed with Billy's sudden "realization" that

it was Ally, not Georgia, whom he most loved—seemed to be made under the auspices of the old Hollywood Production Code. Lacking even the playfulness of the Rock Hudson/Doris Day virginity wars, Billy and Ally struggled drearily in the grip of Hays Office guilt about a couple of kisses, only to find themselves locked so firmly into the show's newly naturalized normality that their story lost all of its former perspective on the human comedy of our need to force our urges into socially policed value systems. Billy's predictable return to Georgia, the final image of her tearfully sipping a martini in a cocktail lounge as he stood beside her tearfully holding her hand and begging forgiveness, was a virtual cartoon of the show's sudden rush home to the reduced possibilities of the 1950's sitcom form.

A second loop in the downward spiral, meriting revulsion as well as disappointment, appeared in its third season premiere on October 25, 1999, when the show began to demonize the inner life that had in the previous six months become so firmly separated from "normal" rationality. The episode hinged on Ally's inexplicable sexual surrender in a carwash to a total stranger who turned out to be the fiancé of the daughter of Cage/Fish's best client. Originally involved with the bride-to-be as her lawyer, Ally had persuaded the girl's minister to perform the marriage ceremony even though the week before the wedding he had accidentally walked in on the girl having sex with another man—to sow a wild oat. Ally was then dragooned into being a bridesmaid at the wedding as a token of the bride's gratitude. When, at the altar, Ally recognized the groom as her mystery lover, she felt impelled to object when the minister asked if anyone knew why the couple ought not be wed. Cornering the bride, Ally then acted as the spokesperson for a normative value system (her sleazy escapade mysteriously and magically qualifying her to make moral pronouncements) and succeeded in getting the bride to call off the wedding to a man who, in Ally's expert eyes, was clearly only after her money. The episode sported the show's most mindless, to date, depiction of a normative protagonist point of view.

Yet the Ally who organizes this new version of the sitcom's reality is no longer capable of dealing with limits and boundaries, the defining characteristics of her early incarnation. Moreover, purporting to tackle the complex feminist issue of women's sexual fantasies, this episode took the occasion to demean nearly all the women on the show as either downright promiscuous or ruled by unappealingly unmanageable sexual desire. While Ally and the bride indulged themselves in one-night stands, Nelle emasculated John Cage, with whom she has finally become a couple, by asking for phone sex. Whipper Cone and Renee, formerly a superior court judge and an assistant district attorney respectively, having decided to go into private law practice together, spent the show giggling pruriently as they interviewed male candidates for a position in their new firm by asking them to remove their shirts. We were asked to believe that these highly accomplished women had a standard of professionalism that included equality of sexual immaturity: they themselves intended to be "eye candy" for their male clients and thought it only fair that potential women clients have "something to look at" too. Worst of all, Elaine sank further into the simple sex cartoon she once dazzlingly avoided as she restored Cage's manhood by whorishly accosting him in the toilet to heat him up, after hearing of his problem by eavesdropping. "Ally McBeal" had collapsed entirely into pandering to the old fear of the supposed unchecked voraciousness of active female sexuality while depicting the mysteries of the inner life as a cesspool against which the old fantasy of normality is helpless to protect us. The rest of the third season promised to follow faithfully in the direction of this descent into the muck.

All this invites the question of why, having succeeded so brilliantly in using the serial form to represent a prismatic view of a manifold reality, "Ally" has regressed entropically to a Production Code mentality that naturalizes most forms of repression. Serial universes generally deteriorate because they have been on air too long and have truly exhausted their range of possibilities, or because important members of the creative team have departed. Yet "Ally's" creative team is intact; nor, as a universe, is it very old. Nevertheless, the fantasy of normality seems to have overtaken the actors, writers, and directors despite initial indications that their sensibilities apprehended a much more piercing vision of human existence. How does one abandon a landmark creation? It is always easy to talk about "selling out" as the answer to such a fall from quality. And indeed there is some evidence that this would not be a rash conclusion. David E. Kelley has contracted to fragment his early organically formed episodes into half-hour segments for immediate syndication of the series on the same station that is continuing to air new episodes, a move that will fill his coffers while mutilating his best creations and bringing them down to the level of the newest, execrable episodes. Nevertheless, there is more to be said.

Could a larger perspective on the problem be generated by Arthur Miller's response on "The Charlie Rose Show" in answer to a question about why there

is currently a dearth of exciting new playwrights? Playwriting, he said, is a reactive discipline. The playwright is nourished by dialogue with a vibrant, heterogenous audience, and Miller saw precious little to respond to right now. The situation is even more desperate for creative teams working in television, where the financially satisfying reward for work is emphasized by a network hierarchy that values nothing but the bottom line, an audience that is generally unresponsive, and a cadre of critics that offers much in terms of verbiage, but little in the way of dialogue to stimulate the creative process. There is no guarantee that even had there been an ideal critical chorus available to David E. Kelley, he would not have taken the catastrophic road he has followed. Yet there would have been a choice.

Is it at least part of "Ally's" problem that under current conditions money is arguably a better option than pride in work? The rewards of money are at least clear, while questions of quality are fraught with confusion when the only widely available cultural discourse about it offers nothing more than the spirit-numbing fatuousness of Maureen Dowd's purportedly feminist demands that Ally be an Aristotelian model of excellent conduct and with the even less pertinent speculation about Calista Flockhart's alleged anorexia.

Imagine how useful to "Ally" a richly perceptive discourse of television criticism might have been. Let us borrow for a moment from Andrey Tarkovsky, who never imagined his aesthetic could be used to discuss mass media entertainment but who evoked the original "Ally" very well in the following statement about his idea of fascinating film fiction: "What is it that we find so arresting? The 'incongruity' of the composition in relation to what is happening. It is in fact the absurdity of the mise-en-scène that catches our attention; but this absurdity is only apparent. It covers something of great significance which gives the mise-en-scène the quality of absolute conviction which makes us believe in the event." Wouldn't *that* have been something for the creative team of "Ally McBeal" to respond to?

* "Brightness falls from the air," is a quotation from "Adieu! Farewell Earth's Bliss" by sixteenth-century poet Thomas Nashe.

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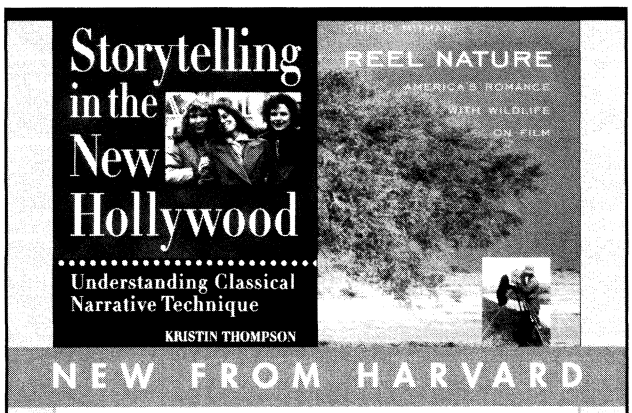

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Reviews

Running: Franka Potente as Lola

Run Lola Run

Director/writer: Tom Tykwer. Producer: Stefan Arndt. Cinematographer: Frank Griebe. Editor: Mathilde Bonnefoy. Sony Pictures Classics.

Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (*Lola rennt*, 1998) blasts open doors for viewers in the late 90s the way Godard's *Breathless* (1959) did for viewers in the late 50s. In few other ways would I compare these two films. Godard's exercise is tinted cool, hip, his characters posturing cartoons; whereas Tykwer's is hot, kinetic, and his (at times animated) characters bristling realities. Though a profoundly philosophical and German film, *Run Lola Run* leaps lightly over the typical Teutonic metaphysical mountains. Tykwer's work doesn't have the Romantic receptive gaze of a Wenders or entertain the grapple with the gods of a Herzog, but instead possesses a ludic spirit willing to see life and art as a game. Nor, though as excited by the techniques of cinema as the film of a first-time director (*Run Lola Run* is Tykwer's eighth movie), is it the loose, dehumanized display of, say, *Pulp Fiction* (1994) or *Trainspotting* (1996). *Run Lola Run* is fast, but never loose. It's as tightly wound and playful as a Tinguely machine and constructed with care.

What are the constituent components of this energized mechanism? This essay proposes that the film's unifying principle is the Game; its unifying theme, Time and determinism; its dominant formal principle, the Dialectic; and its (subsidiary) narrative systems those of the love story and fairy tale. By examining each of these areas and related motifs, I hope to illuminate at least some of the rules of Tom Tykwer's game.[1]

I. THE GAME

> As long as I can play the game,
> I can play it, and everything is all right.
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein

Of the films two epigraphs (the first by T. S. Eliot and the second by S. Herberger), the one that concerns me at the moment is the second: *"Nach dem Spiel ist*

vor dem Spiel." "After the game is before the game." Or: When one game ends, another is about to begin. Hardly a pause, and even the pause is preparation for the next game. What dominates, whether before or after the game, is the game itself. So whatever else this epigraph might mean (and who might S. Herberger be? A German soccer coach, *natürlich*), it reminds us that while watching *Run Lola Run* we should never forget that we are in a sense watching a game. Or in several senses.

Games, like films, are usually time-bound, and Lola (Franka Potente) is a most time-bound character: she has 20 minutes to come up with 100,000 Deutschmarks in order to save the life of her boyfriend Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu). Games can also be played again; if you lose one game, you can always try again. So if film is like a game, then why not give Lola a second chance to win, or a third? "The space-time continuum is unhinged, so what?" Tykwer said in an interview, "We're at the movies!" (*"Das Raum-Zeit-Kontinuum wird aus den Angeln gehoben, na und? Wir sind doch im Kino!"*) (Tykwer, 137).

Run Lola Run's film antecedent might well be the short *Same Player Shoots Again* (1967) by Wim Wenders. "For me," Wenders has said of this abstract "thriller" which basically repeats a single two-minute shot five times, "it had a lot to do with pinball machines. . . . Visually, it's as if you had five balls. In fact, that was the idea, to edit it this way" (Dawson, 18). A man carrying a machine gun and wearing a long coat is shown from the torso down wounded and, like Lola, running. The two shots that precede the five repeated shots also contain elements one finds in *Run Lola Run*. In a room we see a television with a shot of hands shuffling cards in a Western. In the second shot we see an empty phone booth with the receiver dangling above the ground after a man has run out. The first shot recalls the television in Lola's mother's room at the beginning of each of the three "rounds" (Tykwer's term, *Runde*, also has a boxing connotation in German), though what is playing on the television is an animated Lola running outside the door, and as the camera moves into the television, the frame becomes all animation. The second shot of the Wenders film, it seems to me, is directly referenced by Tykwer whenever we see Manni in or leaving the phone booth. (Intertextuality can't be against the rules in this game.) Also, what Robert Kolker and Peter Beicken say about the Wenders' film is true of *Run Lola Run*: "While the gangster film clues do not add up to a full gangster story, they evoke a milieu, recall expectations, sometimes in a most circuitous way" (22). Though *Run Lola Run* is more narratively complete, it is equally abstract.

Two further thoughts: 1) Games exist, as much as possible, in a zone of safety. Like Wile E. Coyote, a game character can't (or shouldn't) be harmed. No one dies in *Run Lola Run*. 2) The player should be able to affect the outcome of the game. Lola is determined, beyond all logic (so determined that she rises above the logically possible), to win the game. But can a player affect the outcome even of a game of chance such as roulette? Yes, in this case especially roulette.

What is important while viewing *Run Lola Run* is to acknowledge the director's central conceit of life/art/film as a game. In the opening sequence, after the epigraphs, Tykwer again emphasizes the point. A clock's pendulum swings ominously back and forth across the screen. The camera tilts upwards, rises, and we plunge into a gaping black hole of Chronos's mouth. Swallowed by time, we are presented with a handful of characters, zoom-selected, like playing cards, from a crowd of figures. Then a man in a guard's uniform (Armin Rohde) holding a soccer ball tells us: "Ball is round, game lasts 90 minutes. That much is clear. Everything else is theory." (*"Ball is rund, Spiel dauert 90 Minuten. Soviel is schon ma klar. Allet andere is Theorie"* [Tykwer, 7].) And then he says, *"Und ab!"* ("Go!"), kicking the ball high into the air and the camera soars up with it, while below the figures coalesce into the words LOLA RENNT.

II. TIME

> Time is the substance I am made of.
> —Jorge Luis Borges

Then the camera plunges back down toward the lone figure of the guard standing just inside the "O" of LOLA and then into the "O" tunnel of the animated credit sequence. How to escape this "O," the closed circle of time, is Lola's metaphysical problem. Tykwer's assessment that *Run Lola Run* is "an action film that carries a philosophical idea, woven in very playfully, however, not placed in the center" (130) masks the foregrounding of time in the narrative and its use as a frequent visual motif. Clocks, for example, are everywhere: from the film's first sound (the ticking of a clock), to the clock that swallows our gaze in the opening, to the three clocks in the animated credit sequence, to the "O" in LOLA, to the cross-cutting from Lola as she runs to meet Manni, to the clock Manni watches as he waits to see if Lola will arrive before the 20 minutes are up. We

can't ignore Lola's temporal prison. So conscious is the film of time that several of its images serve as visual metaphors of clocks: an overhead shot of Lola running across a square (Round One) makes a circular fountain look like a clock; another overhead (Round Two), of Manni lying on the pavement after an ambulance has run over him, positions him as if his limbs were the hands of a clock.

Perhaps it's for the best that, while she stands in her room talking to Manni on the phone, Lola doesn't notice the tortoise walking past her left foot and thus misses this comic reference to Zeno's second paradox, which, as quoted "more or less in Zeno's words" in *A Newcomer's Guide to the Afterlife*, reads:

> Achilles must first reach the place from which the tortoise started. By that time the tortoise will have got on a little way. Achilles must then traverse that, and still the tortoise will be ahead. Achilles is always coming nearer, but he never makes up to it. (99)

Had she been aware that the tortoise gets a head start on her, she might never have even attempted to reach Manni.

The animated running Lola of the credit sequence punches and shatters clocks one and two, but is swallowed up by clock three. But Lola's shattering of the clocks does foreshadow her developing powers as she becomes more and more aware of her situation—that she is literally repeating, with variations, her 20-minute rounds. To this extent, *Run Lola Run* is a coming-of-age story, albeit a fast-track one, wherein Lola moves from dependence on her parents to independence, from ignorance (powerlessness) to knowledge (power) of her player status in the game universe. "We shall not cease from exploration," reads the film's first epigraph, from T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," "And the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time." The circling back and back again to her problem's beginning allows Lola to "know the place," to understand her situation.

Two examples of how Lola learns from round to round should suffice: 1) Lola, in the animated sequence we move into on her mother's television, runs (Round One) past a dog and a punk kid hanging out on the landing; in Round Two the dog growls and the kid trips her, sending Lola sprawling down the stairs; in Round Three, Lola leaps over the growling dog and astonished kid, then growls back at the dog who whimpers in fright. 2) In Round One Lola runs parallel with then past an ambulance when it skids to a stop in front of a sheet of glass being carried across the street; running alongside the ambulance in Round Two, Lola asks the driver if he can take her, and, distracted, the driver crashes the ambulance through the glass (and shortly after this, he will run over Manni); by Round Three, a wiser Lola, when the ambulance skids to a stop in front of the glass, takes the opportunity to hop into the back, where she will take the hand of a heart attack victim and bring him back to life. (Pointing out that Lola seems to learn things from one round to the next, Tykwer said: "Logically speaking it's impossible, of course—but to secretly play down such elements is the beauty of film" [137]).

If Lola could stop time (and she can, but doesn't know it yet), she would. In her father's bank office (Round One), frustrated with his unwillingness to help her and learning that her "Papa" (Herbert Knaup) is having an affair with a woman (Nina Petri) who also works in the bank, Lola screams, shattering the clock on the wall and stopping for a moment, at least figuratively, her tormentor. Earlier she has screamed at Manni on the phone in order to shut him up, and the bottles on her TV break. But it is the third scream, in the casino at the roulette wheel, shot in a tight close-up (a visual shout), that is truly efficacious and fantastic. This time, besides shattering the drinking glasses on the sideboards and in the guests' hands, her scream is the manifestation of her immanent will which causes the ball rolling around in the wheel to rest finally on 20, the number, of course, of Lola's game—the temporal condition placed on her saving Manni's life and her bet.

The roulette wheel is another image of Lola's temporal circling. Lola herself, long before we enter the casino, seems to be in the middle of a wheel when she turns round and round as the faces of people she considers asking for the DM 100,000 appear before her, among them her father, who shakes his head "No," and an animated figure (later we'll recognize him as the live-action croupier [Klaus Müller] in the casino), who says, *"Rien ne va plus"* ("No more bets"). In one frame, Lola runs past a wall with a roulette wheel's spoke-like pattern, suggesting Lola is less player at this moment than she is the ball put into play (or is she the wheel's axis?). But the movement of a roulette ball isn't altogether circular. The ball moves clockwise to the wheel's counterclockwise motion, and the friction this creates causes it eventually to fall into the wheel's bowl. Thus, with a little opposition, a dialectical nudge, the circle becomes a spiral, and the spiral, as Vladimir Nabokov knew, "is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free" (275).

III. THE DIALECTIC

> I thought this up when I was a schoolboy,
> and I also discovered that Hegel's triadic series
> (so popular in old Russia) expressed
> merely the essential spirality of all things
> in their relation to time.
> —Vladimir Nabokov

This dialectical shift from circle to spiral is visually represented in the sign for a nightclub, Die Spirale, that spirals (like an imploding clock) behind Manni on the corner where he phones Lola. The image is also seen in the animated tunnel/spiral in the credit sequence, and in several camera movements: around Manni and Lola when they are surrounded by the police; in the 180° turn/reverse turn around Manni and the bum (Joachim Król) who has Manni's money bag; around Lola's mother (Ute Lubosch) before we enter the animated image on television of Lola running down the (spiral) staircase. We even see a spiral pattern on Manni and Lola's pillows in the "transitional" between-life-and-death scenes of our two characters in bed. These spirals remind us that Lola's journey is not essentially circular. Time for Lola (and for us) is not circular, but (dialectically) spiral.

On the narrative level, the tripartite structure functions as the film's fulcrum. In Round One (thesis) Lola dies; in Round Two (antithesis) Manni dies; in Round Three (synthesis) both live. In Round One Manni holds up a Bolle supermarket; in Round Two Lola holds up her father's bank; in Round Three both get lucky: Lola wins DM 100,000 at the casino and Manni recovers the DM 100,000 the bum picked up when Manni accidentally left his bag on the subway.

Other significant (and seemingly insignificant) events deviate from round to round.

Lola and Papa

I: Lola's father agrees to marry his mistress, rejects Lola's plea for help, and shoves her out of the bank; II: Lola's father learns from his mistress he is not the progenitor of her pregnancy, and Lola steals the guard's gun and forces Papa at gun point to tell the bank teller (Lars Rudolph) to give her the money; III: Lola arrives at the bank too late; Papa has already left with Herr Meier (Ludger Pistor).

Lola and Herr Meier

I: Lola runs past a car leaving a driveway; distracted by Lola, the driver does not see the oncoming car containing Ronnie (Heino Forch), the drug dealer for whom Manni made the drop and pick-up, and his two musclemen, and Ronnie's car slams into the driver's; II: Lola jumps onto and across the hood of the car leaving the driveway; distracted, the driver (we still don't know he's Herr Meier) slams into Ronnie's oncoming car; III: Lola lands on the hood of Herr Meier's car, recognizes him, and he her; Herr Meier asks, *"Lola, alles in Ordnung?"* ("Lola, is everything O.K.?"), and Lola says "No," while Ronnie's car passes unharmed (for the moment—later in Round Three the two cars will be in an accident).

Lola and the bad-tempered woman with the baby carriage

I: Lola almost runs into a bad-tempered woman (Julia Lindig) with a baby carriage, who shouts after Lola, "Watch where you're going, you slut!" (*"Paß doch auf, du Schlampe!"*); II: Lola almost runs into the bad-tempered woman with a baby carriage who shouts after Lola: "Hey! Watch out, you stupid cow!" (*"Mensch! Augen auf, du blöde Kuh!"*) and adds, *"Kackschlampe!"* ("Fucking bitch!"). III: Lola misses her entirely, and the bad-tempered woman just hisses after her but says nothing.

Lola and the bum

I: Lola brushes past the bum carrying Manni's drug money bag; II: Lola bumps straight into him, but again has no idea he holds the (or one) solution to her dilemma; III: Lola doesn't encounter the bum at all, because he has bought a bicycle from . . .

Lola and the bicycler

I: Running parallel with a bicycler (Sebastian Schipper), Lola is offered the bike for DM 50, declines, and runs up the steps of a bridge; II: again, Lola is asked if she needs a bicycle and is offered it for DM 50, and the bicycler adds that it's "like new," but Lola says, "It's stolen!" (perhaps a true insight or she's recalling what made her miss her appointment with Manni in the first place, and thus the event that sets the dominoes of this tale tumbling: the theft of her Moped), and the bicycler pedals past her. (Lola's Moped and its thief will also be involved in the [third] accident between Herr Meier's and Ronnie's cars.); III: running onto the street to avoid the group of nuns she has in the previous rounds run through, she bumps into the bicycler, apologizes, runs on, and the biker tuns off to an Imbiss kiosk where he sells the bum the bicycle, which causes Lola not to encounter him in this round, but allows Manni later to see him and chase him down.

Like a pinball, the characters (objects) in *Run Lola Run* carom crazily from cushion to knob to flipper to (ding! ding!) post, and from round to round no character follows the exact same pattern. Each contact effects changes in all that follow (like the "run" of the stacked dominoes falling that we see on Lola's TV when she is talking to Manni on the phone in the narrative's opening), but the points of (present or absent) contact (chronologically: Lola's mother on the phone, the animated Lola and punk kid with dog, Lola and the bad-tempered woman with the baby carriage, Lola and Herr Meier, Lola and the nuns, Lola and the bicycler, Lola and the bum, Lola and the bank guard, Lola and Papa, Lola and the old woman in front of the bank she asks for the time, Lola and the ambulance, Lola and Manni) never change.

That cause and effect (the smallest cause producing a great consequence) is definitely on Tykwer's mind is clear if we consider some of the film's rapid-fire flash forwards. "UND DANN" ("AND THEN") these sequences begin, and what follows is a series of still frames accompanied by the shutter click and whir of a still camera that reveals a minor character's future. The three futures of the bad-tempered woman are, from round to round: 1) She becomes a social welfare case, loses her child, steals another in a park while the father is taking a piss in the bushes, and is last seen being chased by the father and two other people; 2) she buys a Lotto ticket and wins, purchases a new car, is last seen in a lounge chair beside her baby in a crib as she and her husband share a toast in the front yard of her new home; 3) she encounters a Jehovah's Witness on the street, prays in a church, her husband takes communion, and she is last seen with another woman on the street offering copies of Jehovah's Witness publications *Erwachet!* (*Awake*) and *Wachturm* (*Watchtower*).

As chaos theory attests, the slightest variation can produce enormous changes for the characters. After Lola runs past the bicycler in Round One, his first future finds him chased and beaten up by hard rockers; then, his face still bruised and bloodied, he buys a meal in a cafeteria, is befriended by the cashier, and the two of them are last seen in their wedding clothes as they leave their wedding. In Round Two, now a bum with a beard, he begs in front of a supermarket, begs in the subway, blathers to a woman on a bench in the forest, and is last seen as a junkie passed out in a WC. In Round Three, when Lola leaves him, instead of a flash forward, the image shifts to video (this occurs whenever Lola or Manni are not in a scene), and we follow him to the Imbiss where he meets the bum with Manni's money who will buy his bicycle, which means Lola will not encounter him in Round Three, but Manni will. "Twirl follows twirl," Nabokov says, "and every synthesis is the thesis of the next series" (275). (Although I am using the term "dialectic," as does Nabokov, in a rather loose sense, a more rigorous Hegelian approach could be applied to *Run Lola Run*: the antithesis [Round Two] *does* negate the thesis [Round One], and the synthesis [Round Three] incorporates both, allowing Lola to land with a new, hard-won knowledge of her basic ontological ground, not "Being" as such but at least "Becoming," which, as Hegel said, "is the first adequate vehicle of truth" [122].)

The dialectic also generates much of the film's visual multiplicity. Tykwer's use of the split screen exemplifies *Run Lola Run*'s dialectical strategy. In frame left, Manni outside the Bolle awaits Lola; in frame right, Lola runs desperately toward Manni, their faces almost touching in cinematic but not narrative space; then from bottom frame arises, up to Manni and Lola's necks, the top arc of the supermarket's clock as the second hand ticks to 12. In another split screen, we see frame left Manni foregrounded and Lola backgrounded, and frame right Lola foregrounded and Manni backgrounded—an example, one might say, of a simultaneous shot/reverse shot. The simultaneous dialectical move is also shown when Lola's image is wiped to the right while the Bolle's automatic door opens to the left.

The possibilities generated by *Run Lola Run*'s dialectical drive, its oppositional play, links with the film's theme of "the possibilities of life." As Tykwer told his interviewer:

> A film about the possibilities of life, it was clear, needed to be a film about the possibilities of cinema as well. That's why there are different formats in *Run Lola Run*; there is color and black and white, slow motion and speeded-up motion, all elementary building blocks that have been used for ages in film history. George Méliès was already able to work with these effects, especially with double exposure and tricks. . . . Animation suggests: anything can happen in any given moment, and that gives the film additional power (131).

Black and white is used for Lola and Manni's memory sequences, when Lola remembers the theft of her Moped and Manni recalls how he lost the drug money. The animated moments are in the credit sequence, Lola running out of the apartment (first seen on her mother's television), and the single shot of the croupier saying *"Rien ne va plus."* Video, as stated before, only occurs in those sequences which neither Lola nor Manni

witness directly, but which fill in the narrative, for example the bum picking up the bag on the subway, Papa and his mistress in his bank office together before Lola arrives, and when the bicycler meets the bum at the kiosk.

"*Run Lola Run* is a movie about the possibilities of the world, of life, and of cinema," Tykwer told his crew (117). Tykwer's ludic sensibility shapes the film's formal qualities (the aesthetic rules of the game), as well as informing the film's themes: of time, determinism, and possibility. The dialectical play helps keep it all alive. And what is the life possibility driving the film's basic narrative? Well, love, of course, as in any typical Hegelian movie romance.

IV. LOVE STORY

> I shall have to say, for example, that there is
> on the one hand a multiplicity
> of successive states of consciousness,
> and on the other a unity
> which binds them together.
> —Henri Bergson

Lola loves Manni. That much is clear. Lola minus Manni makes no sense. Lola plus Manni is what matters. "I'm a part of you, dear," are the lyrics we hear when Lola is shot at the end of Round One; "My lonely nights are through, dear, since you said you were mine." Aren't the sentiments expressed here in part what brings Lola out of death, allowing her to begin her game again? Tykwer's "Union of the Heart" song in the film contains these lyrics: "Love is the only strain/ That lets me live through my pain." Not perhaps the most elegant rhyme, but the message is unmistakable. These two young people belong together, and Lola is ready to stretch and twist and transform the boundaries of logic to reunite with Manni.

And it is Lola, we must remember, who is the driving force here; Lola runs, whereas Manni is more often than not stationary. Lola is the player who must counteract the deterministic forces set against her winning the game. Still, these two are a pair, emotionally and visually. Thus the split frames that put them side by side and the liminal, between-life-and-death scenes that find them in bed together. There are even subtle, complex, near match-cuts of the two of them: In an overhead shot, Lola in frame left runs diagonally up left across a square in a grid pattern with a fountain (circle/clock/wheel) frame right. Cut to: a low angle shot of Manni frame left in the phone booth with its grid pattern and frame right the large spiral of the club Die Spirale. Thus, shots A/B: Lola/Manni to the left; circle/spiral to the right (circle to spiral in one stroke!). This from Round One. In Round Two, Tykwer changes the angle, but not the connection. In the overhead shot, Lola runs across the square, but the fountain is out of the frame and the square's grid is at a diagonal—Lola runs parallel with the gridline, not against it. Cut to: Manni in the phone booth shot at a low angle with the phone booth's grid in the same diagonal as the square's grid, and the spiral is out of the frame.[2]

Another dialectical conjoining of Lola and Manni occurs when Lola helps Manni rob the Bolle by knocking down the security guard. His gun slides (like a hockey puck) to Manni's feet (←), and Manni shuffles it back to Lola (→). In the transitional universe we slip into after each lover "dies," Manni and Lola are lying side by side. We see them only from their shoulders up lying on their pillows with their spiral patterns. After Lola's "death," she lies on Manni's arm; after Manni's "death," he lies on Lola's arm.

Lola's passion (it's never overtly a sexual passion, but one of love) and the film's manifest themselves, as I've already suggested, in the narrative and the multiplicity of cinematic techniques (animation, video, black and white, jump cuts, slow motion, rapid and sometimes collisive montage, Lola running in one direction dissolving into Lola running in another direction), but one could say the key emblem for this mercurial, exhilarating film's passion is the color red. Lola's phone is red and so is the bag with money. A red ambulance runs over Manni. A red light is foregrounded, a red car passes by. Red arrows on a wall point Lola in the direction she's running. The Bolle sign is red. Fades to red occur when Lola and Manni, respectively, die and enter a liminal zone shot with a red filter. And, of course, Lola's hair is red. A bright, dyed red, the film's visual lifeblood threading its way through this 24-frames-per-second labyrinth. "I wish I were a heartbeat/That never comes to rest," sings the voice of Franka Potente (Lola) during Lola's third and, at last, successful run.

At the end of the second round, when Lola appears before Manni can rob the supermarket, Manni looks lovingly at her, crosses the street, and gets run over by the ambulance. These two lovers only have eyes for each other. One would think that this would have been enough to keep at bay the critics who saw in the film's stylistic display and speed an anti-humanistic element. Janet Maslin, in her *New York Times* review (March 26, 1999), after praising the film as "playfully profound," continued her "praise" by calling *Run Lola Run* "post-

human"—hardly an accurate term for the human moments evident in the desires and dilemmas of the characters (*all* the characters) and the director's aesthetic (humanistic) vision. Which is not to say that *Run Lola Run* is a realistic, in-depth, psychological character study; fairy tales never are.

V. FAIRY TALE

> Play only becomes possible, thinkable and understandable when an influx of *mind* breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos.
> —Johan Huizinga

For what is *Run Lola Run* if not a fairy tale, albeit of the self-conscious, philosophical variety. The film itself is clearly aware of its fairy tale status. Its tripartite structure is the same structural (and magical) three that underlies so many traditional fairy tales. In her "Wish" song, Lola sings "I wish I were a princess/With armies at her hand/I wish I were a ruler/Who'd make them understand." Lola is our princess and Manni our prince, though the genders, as is appropriate for the late 1990s (in the sense that the princess must save the prince), are reversed. True, these two are not your usual figures of royalty, but then neither at first were *Aschenbrödel* and *Schneewittchen* (Cinderella and Snow White). Lola's father isn't a stand-up papa (and possibly, according to what he tells her in Round One, he isn't even her real father), and her mother's an astrologically fixated drunk. But the bank guard Schuster recognizes on some level Lola's "royalty": in Round One he calls her the "house princess" (*"Holla, holla, Lolalola, die Hausprinzessin"*) and in Round Two he lectures her on the virtues of queens. It is their third encounter that reveals the film's deeper fairy tale status.

Lola, having just missed her father, stands in front of the entrance of the bank, shouting *"Scheiße, Scheiße!"* ("Shit, shit!") when Schuster, his fairy tale role as doorkeeper now altered, steps outside for a smoke break. "So you made it at last, darling," he says (*"Da bist du ja endlich, Schatz"*), which Lola finds not at all amusing. Schuster himself seems surprised by what he says. Something isn't right here. Lola's gaze rivets him. Does he recognize that this is the third time Lola has come to the bank, that somehow his world has been split three-ways? Do he and Lola realize that it's she who's controlling the game? How has he become a part of Lola's game of repetition with variations? Or is it possible that he recalls, if only faintly, his role in the film's prologue as the kicker of the soccer ball, the one who puts the (non-diegetic) ball into play? And if so, what are the ontological consequences of his recognition? Lola runs on, but Schuster stands still, and we hear the loud pounding of his heart.

Does Lola possess the power to affect the heart rate of the characters in her game? Certainly from run to run she has gained in knowledge and power. No need in this final round to ask the old woman for the time (she's not even in this round); instead, Lola enters the casino and twice wills the ball (the second time with the help of her scream) to land on 20. Then she climbs into the back of the ambulance and there on the stretcher is Schuster having his heart massaged, but to no effect. "What do you want here?" the attendant asks, and Lola says, "I belong to him" (*"Ich gehör zu ihm"*). Then she holds his hand and brings his heart beat back to normal.

No question now that we're headed for a fairy tale happy ending. Lola has the money to save Manni, and Manni, as it turns out, has found his missing money (with the help of the fairy tale-like blind woman outside the phone booth whose "gaze" he follows and sees the bum passing by on a bicycle) and returned it to Ronnie. As they hold hands, Manni asks Lola what's in the bag. Lola smiles. The End. But we should note the film's final dialectical move: ENDE enters from frame right and the credits roll from top down.

Life, *Run Lola Run* implies, is like a game of roulette; the player is not the spinner; nonetheless, the player can affect the outcome. Or as Tykwer puts it: "The world is a stack of domino stones, and we are one of them. . . . On the other hand, the most important statement is the end: Not everything is predetermined" (117).

Finally, fairy tales begin *"Es war einmal,"* "Once upon a time," and this omniscient point of view is echoed in *Run Lola Run*'s opening. What is the world of the film's prologue? Not exactly a diegetic one; more the open ground before the actual story begins, when a voice speaks to us, not the author, but a storyteller outside the limitations of time. Characters mill around and from them the camera selects those who will be in the game. And as it does, a voice says:

> Man, probably the most enigmatic species on our planet. A mystery of open questions. Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? How do we know what we believe we know? Why do we believe anything? Innumerable questions searching for an answer, an answer that will generate a new question,

and the next answer the next question, and so on, and so on. But in the end, isn't it always the same question, and always the same answer?

Hans Paetsch, the actor who delivers this voiceover, "was God" for Tykwer as a child, "because he always knew everything. *Run Lola Run* is a game in which we claim the power, so to speak, to change bits and pieces and to influence fate as well. Something that usually only gods can do. Hans Paetsch, with his soft, warm voice, brings irony into the construct and in this way expresses that *Run Lola Run* is a fairy tale as well" (130). German viewers of all ages recognize in Paetsch's voice the omniscient narrator of fairy tales. With this reflexive gesture ("influx of *mind*"), Tykwer begins his film's philosophical project of disrupting determinism, and for the next 81 minutes, like Lola, we, too, if we work at it, can become the player rather than the played.

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Notes

I wish to thank Susan Bernofsky for her comments on this essay and Annette Wiesner for her suggestions, insights, and close readings, which made my work not only better but possible.

1. Throughout this essay I rely on the original German of the film, at times complemented by the shooting script. Credit for the translations, with minor emendations by me, is due to Annette Wiesner.
2. Annette Wiesner connected these four shots for me.

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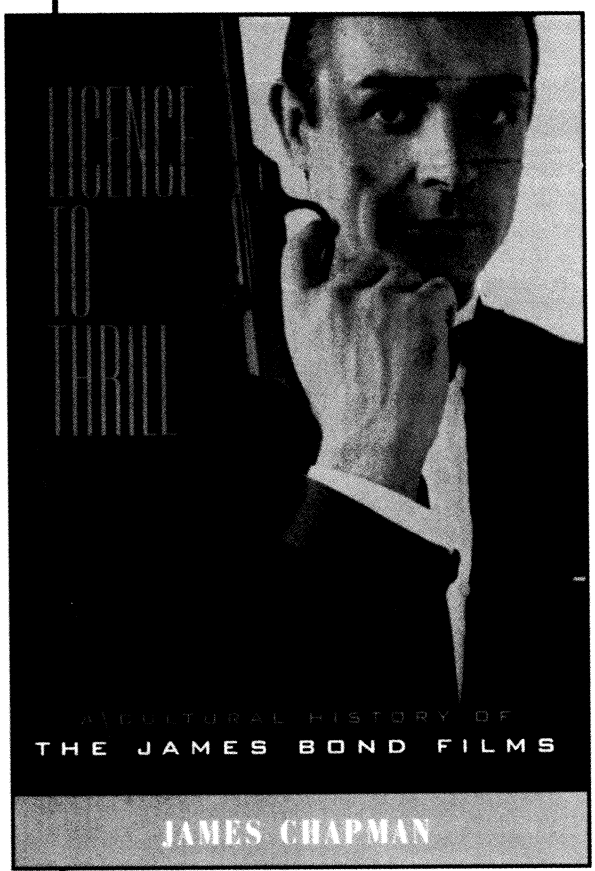

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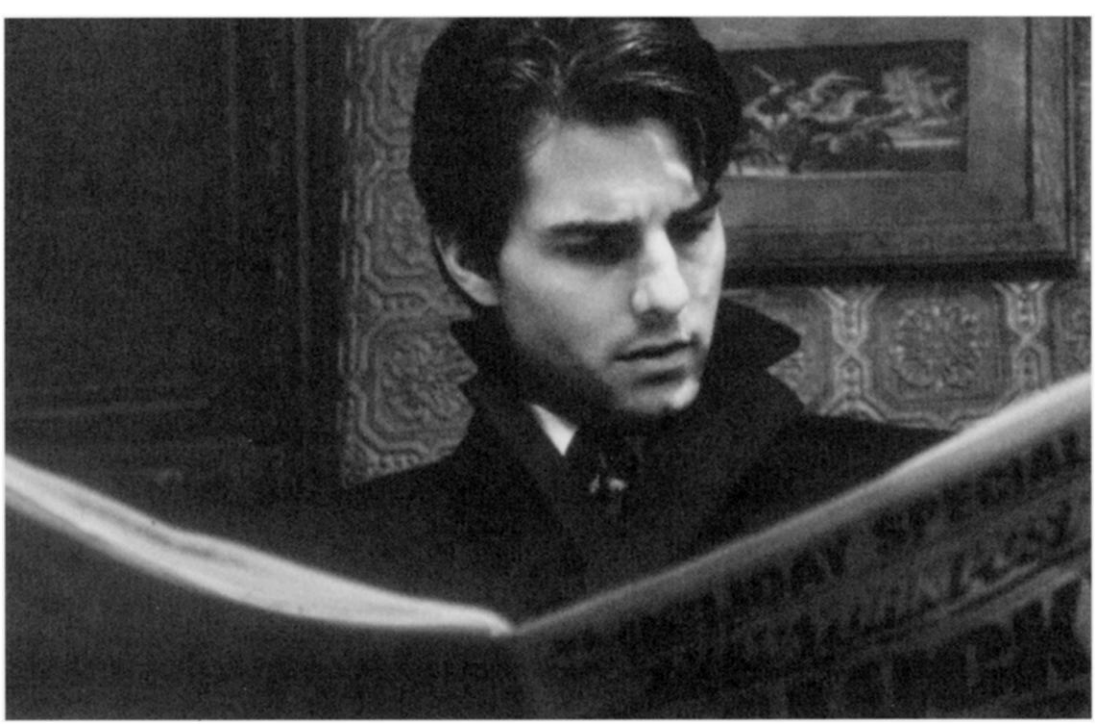
Eyes Wide Shut

Director: Stanley Kubrick. Writers: Kubrick, Frederic Raphael. Producers: Kubrick, Brian W. Cook. Cinematographer: Larry Smith III. Warner Bros.

Critical disappointment with *Eyes Wide Shut* was almost unanimous, and the complaint was always the same: not sexy. The reviewers of the national press sounded like a bunch of schoolkids who'd snuck in to see it and slouched out three hours later feeling frustrated, horny, and ripped off. Once again Stanley Kubrick flouted genre expectations, and once again, as throughout his career, critics and audiences could only see what wasn't there. Why exactly anyone who had seen his previous films believed the hype and expected his last one to be what *Entertainment Weekly* breathlessly anticipated as "The Sexiest Movie Ever" is still not clear; the most erotic sex scenes Kubrick ever filmed were the bomber refueling in *Dr. Strangelove* and the space docking in *2001*. He mocks any prurient expectations in the very first shot of this movie: without prelude, Nicole Kidman steps into the frame, her back to the camera, shrugs off her dress and kicks it away, standing matter-of-factly bare-assed before us for a moment before the screen goes black and the main title appears. It's as if to say, "You came to see a big-time movie star get naked? Here ya go. Show's over. Now let's get serious."

So okay, no, *Eyes Wide Shut* is not a sexy film. The story's sexual mores and taboos—jealousy over dreams and fantasies, guilt-ridden visits to prostitutes, a strained discussion of a positive HIV test that echoes the old social terror of syphilis—are all transplanted more or less intact straight out of Arthur Schnitzler's fin-de-siècle Vienna, seeming quaint and naïve by the standards of the sordid year 1999. But *Eyes Wide Shut* is not about "sex." The real pornography in this film is in its lingering, overlit depiction of the shameless, naked wealth of end-of-the-millennium Manhattan, and of the obscene effect of that wealth on the human soul, and on society. National reviewers' myopic focus on sex and the shallow psychologies of the film's central couple, the Harfords, at the expense of every other element in the film—the trappings of stupendous wealth, the references to fin-de-siècle Europe and other imperial periods, the Christmastime setting, or even the sum spent by Dr. Harford on a single illicit night out—suggests more about the blindness of the elites to their own surroundings than it does about Stanley Kubrick's inadequacies as a pornographer. For those with their eyes open, there are plenty of money shots.

There is a moment in *Eyes Wide Shut*, as Dr. Bill Harford is lying to his wife over the phone from the apartment of a prostitute, when we see a textbook in the foreground called *Introducing Sociology*. The book's title serves as a sly, mirthless caption to the scene (like the slogan PEACE IS OUR PROFESSION in *Dr. Strangelove*), showing us prostitution as the basic and defining transaction of our society. It is also, more importantly, a key to reading the film, suggesting that we



Tom Cruise as Dr. Bill Harford

ought to interpret it *sociologically*—not, as most reviewers insisted on doing, psychologically.

"If Kubrick was going to make a movie about sexual obsession," wrote Stuart Klawans of *The Nation*, "he should have chosen characters with interesting individual psychologies." Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* pointed out that Kubrick "never paid much attention to the psychology of his characters, much less relationships between men and women," and has, in fact, "spent his career ignoring (or avoiding) . . . the inner lives of people, their private dreams and frustrations." Unable to imagine what other subjects there could be, she, like so many reviewers over the years, shrugged Kubrick off as obsessed with pure sophistication of technique. These reactions recall the befuddlement of critics who complained that the astronauts in *2001* acted less human than the computer HAL, but could only attribute this (just four years after the performances of *Dr. Strangelove*) to bad direction. But Kubrick's films are never only about individuals. (Sometimes, as in the case of *2001*, they hardly even contain any.) They are always about civilization, about human history. Even *The Shining* is not just about a family, as Bill Blakemore has shown in his eye-opening article "The Family of Man," but about the massacre of the Native Americans and the recurrent murderousness of Western civilization.

Bill and Alice Harford's psyches do seem as naïve and sexually sheltered as those of the Victorians in, say, Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*, but to wish that the characters had been more complex or self-aware misses the point. To understand a film by this most thoughtful and painstaking of filmmakers, we should assume that this characterization is *deliberate*; the Harfords' shallowness and repression *is* the point. Think of Bill in the back of the cab, his face a sullen mask as he runs the same dirty black-and-white movie of Alice's imagined infidelity over and over in his head—a married man of nine years profoundly shaken by the revelation that his wife was once attracted to another man. (Anyone who doubts that it is the character, rather than the actor, who lacks depth and expressiveness should watch Cruise in *Magnolia*.) The intensely staged vacuity of the Harfords' inner lives tells us to look elsewhere for the film's real interests.

One place to look is not at the characters but around them, at the places where they live and the things they own. Most of the film's sets, even the New York street scenes, were constructed on sound stages and backlots, just like the Overlook Hotel, which was as central to *The Shining* as its actors. Precision of visual detail is as integral to the meaning of *Eyes Wide Shut* as is the use of famous, gorgeous faces familiar from the covers of supermarket magazines to play the conspicuously attractive high-society couple (like the casting of handsome, bland-faced Ryan O'Neal as the eighteenth-century social climber Remond Barry in *Barry Lyndon*). Even the street sets (criticized by the uniquely provincial New York press as inaccurate) are expressionistic in intent, with neon signs like "Pink Pussycat" and "EROS" foreshadowing and commenting on the action. In Kubrick's mature work, nothing is incidental; every detail of mise-en-scène should be assumed purposeful and significant.

Stephen Hunter of the *Washington Post* mentions that the Harfords' apartment "must have cost $7 million," but only to mock Kubrick's apparent disconnection from contemporary America. But the meticulously rendered settings of the film, the luxurious apartments and sumptuous mansions, are *meant* to raise eyebrows. The Harfords' standard of living raises questions about their wealth and where it comes from. From Bill's sparsely scheduled private practice, or from his "house calls" and the sorts of under-the-table services we see him render at Ziegler's party? Bill Harford is on call to that class of person who can afford not to wait in emergency rooms or die in hospitals, people like Victor Ziegler. Although Bill condescendingly calls the prostitute Domino's apartment "cozy," his own place looks cramped and cluttered compared to Ziegler's, with its vast ballrooms and stairways reminiscent of the haunted Overlook Hotel, its cascades of glittering lights, its mirrors and gilt, its bedroom-sized bathrooms. And even Ziegler's house seems modest and sensible compared to the opulent Moorish palace of Somerton, where the secret orgy takes place (in Schnitzler's novella it is merely "a one-story villa in a modest Empire style"). To some extent, the fact that no reviewers recognized this as deliberate is forgivable; we've all learned to ignore the fantastic affluence of the sets and costumes in most movies and TV shows, just as black audiences have had, for decades, to filter out the whiteness of most characters in the media. But make no mistake: this is not a film about the "private dreams and frustrations" of what Ziegler calls "ordinary people"; it is, very pointedly, about really *rich* people, that notorious one percent of the population that owns forty percent of the wealth.

The paintings that cover the Harfords' walls from floor to ceiling (most of them painted by Kubrick's wife Christine), almost without exception depict gardens, flowers, or food, making explicit the function of art in this environment as decor, art for consumption—a commodity. Helena, the Harfords' daughter, helps Alice

Nicole Kidman
as Alice Harford

Christmas-wrap a massive collection of reproductions by Van Gogh (the very icon of an artist who suffered pitiably for his work during his lifetime but whose reproductions on calendars, ties, and coffee mugs now produce quick multimillions for the canny profiteers of the museum industry). The apartment of Bill's patient Lou Nathanson is decorated with even more expensive objets d'art, tastefully placed in spotlit alcoves, and his bedroom is wallpapered with imperial blue and gold fleurs-de-lis (just like the hallway outside the Harfords' own apartment). And Victor Ziegler has a famous art collection: collections of antique china arrayed in glass cases, a soaring winged statue of Cupid and Psyche in his stairwell, and, reputedly, a collection of Renaissance bronzes upstairs. Like Clare Quilty's trashed mansion in *Lolita*, these houses are stocked with the plundered treasures of the world.

Sandor Szavost, Alice's would-be seducer at Ziegler's ball, inquires at one point whether she knows Ovid's *Art of Love*, a satiric guide to the niceties of seduction and intrigue, set among the elite classes of Augustus's imperial Rome, that includes valuable instruction on matters from buying gifts and bribing servants to not trusting your friends and keeping your mouth shut. Szavost, like Ovid, is urbane, witty and amoral, and his drinking deliberately from Alice's glass is a move lifted straight out of Ovid's pick-up manual. The fact that Ovid was an exile from his own center of empire ("Didn't he end up alone, crying his eyes out someplace with a very bad climate?" asks Alice) links him to the expatriate Hungarian Szavost, whose extraordinary skill at the defunct Viennese waltz allows him to guide Alice effortlessly around the ballroom, drunk though she is on champagne. (The presence of so many European expatriates in the film—Szavost, the models Gayle and Nuala, Mariane Nathanson, and Milich—reinforces the association of 1999 America with fin-de-siècle Europe, another corrupt and decadent high culture on the brink of disaster.) Szavost's invitation to Alice to come upstairs and see Ziegler's collection of bronze sculptures extends the instances of imperially sponsored high art from the Latin poetry of ancient Rome to the plastic arts of the Renaissance to ballroom dance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and into contemporary New York's glittering, art-encrusted facade. America has absorbed and established continuity with all these earlier imperial periods.

Alice reluctantly resists Szavost's effort at seduction in the name of her marriage (though she later assures her husband that she knows he had only wanted to have sex with her). The theme of women being dangerously fucked at the epicenters of empire is meanwhile being established elsewhere. Behind the scenes at Victor's party, in an upstairs bathroom, Bill Harford finds the same thing that Jack Torrance finds in the Overlook's bathroom, and that Private Joker finds at the end of *Full Metal Jacket*: a woman's body. Banal dance music echoes hollowly from downstairs as we

see Mandy sprawled naked in a narcotic stupor. Victor (an imperial name, like Alexander deLarge in *A Clockwork Orange*) is hurriedly pulling up his pants, his sexual use of the girl having been interrupted by her overdose. After Dr. Bill brings her around, Ziegler secures his compliance in keeping this near-scandal "just between us." But with reference to a broad sweep of imperial styles, and with eyes open to all of their exploitative associations (the painting on the wall behind Victor is a nude), our contemporary American artist-in-exile, Stanley Kubrick, in his own bitterly parodic *Art of Love*, tells all. Asked about Alex's fondness for Beethoven, Kubrick answered: "I think this suggests the failure of culture to have any morally refining effect on society. Many top Nazis were cultured and sophisticated men, but it didn't do them, or anyone else, much good." The use of *Fidelio*, "an opera by Beethoven" as Nick Nightingale points out, as the password to the orgy is not just heavy-handed irony (fidelity) but a reiteration of this critique.

As omnipresent and unnoticed as the art in the film's backgrounds are its Christmas decorations. It's not incidental that the film is set at Christmastime; Schnitzler's book, which the script follows very closely in most other particulars, is not (it takes place "just before the end of carnival period"). Stanley Kubrick seems to have gotten seriously into the Yuletide spirit in this film; *Eyes Wide Shut* is *the* Christmas movie of 1999. Hardly an interior in the film (except for the Satanic orgy) is without a gaudily baubled Christmas tree. Almost every set is suffused with the hazy glow of colored lights and tinsel. The film's denouement, the final conversation between the Harfords, takes place in a decidedly upscale department store where their daughter indulges herself "Christmas shopping," identifying items she wants exclusively for herself.

There is, in fact, a chain of allusions to the Judeo-Christian fall-and-redemption myth throughout the film; Alice's dream about being "naked and ashamed," and fucking "in a beautiful garden"; the Harfords' Edenic apartment crammed with plants and paintings of gardens; the picture of an apple with a single vaginal slice cut from it on the wall of Domino's kitchen; the self-sacrificial ritual at the orgy. But, compared to the subtler imagery in the rest of the film, these seem very clumsy and nineteenth-century and decidedly un-Kubrickian. (The only overtly Christian imagery in his films are Alex's ceramic chorus line of dancing Christs and Biblical-epic daydream about being a centurion who gets to flog Him in *A Clockwork Orange*, in which film Christianity is clearly just another, less effective form of the sadistic Ludovico treatment.) In fact, these Biblical allusions only serve to show us how bankrupt the Christian ethic is in America at the turn of the millennium, how completely it has been coöpted and undermined by the culture of commerce. As Ziegler angrily tells Bill in their final confrontation, "That whole play-acted 'take me' phony sacrifice you've been jerking yourself off with had absolutely nothing to do with her [Mandy's] real death!" No—her real death had more to do with the cult of power and secrecy at the heart of wealth. In other words, just business.

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, as in the real world of the United States circa 1999, Christmas is less a religious observance than a frenzied, culminating orgy of consumerism, the climax of the retail year. MERRY CHRISTMAS banners hang in the backgrounds at places of business along with signs reading NO CHECKS ACCEPTED and THANK YOU FOR YOUR CUSTOM. Rows of Christmas cards are on display at Doctor Bill's office below a not particularly merry sign saying "Payment is expected at the time of treatment unless other arrangements have previously been made." These juxtapositions undercut the supposed significance of the holiday and reveal the real nature of the season, its ostensible warmth and sentimentality belied by the bottom line. Milich, the owner of Rainbow Costumes, even calls holiday greetings after the two men who have just come to "another arrangement" concerning the use of his daughter. The whole movie is brimming over with the spirit of the season.

The Harfords themselves (like most of the film's reviewers) don't really see their surrounding mise-en-scène—their wealth, their art, the ubiquitous Christmas glitz. They're preoccupied instead with their own interior lives, the petty lusts and jealousies which they think of as distinct from their exterior world. But again and again Kubrick visually links his characters to their settings, indicting them as part of the rarefied world in which they live and move, through which his relentless Steadicam tracks them like an omniscient presence. At Ziegler's ball, the starburst pattern of lights seen on the walls in the background is echoed in the lace edging of Alice Harford's gown and in the blue stelliform ribbon on Sandor Szavost's lapel. Domino first appears in a black-and-white striped fur coat, a pattern repeated in the zebra skin stool at her dresser and in the coat of a plush tiger on her bed. Like the art in the film, everything here is decor, commodity—*everything* can be bought.

And everyone. Alice Harford's status is subtly but unmistakably suggested: the wife as prostitute. She is associated with the streetwalker Domino by purple, the color of her sheets and of Domino's dress, and by their

dressing-table mirrors. She's *also* associated with Mandy; we first see them both in bathrooms, they share a taste for numbing intoxicants, and Mandy's last night "being fucked by hundreds of men" is distortedly echoed in Alice's "nightmare." Mandy and Domino are connected, as in dream-associations, by the shared consonants of their names; Alice is similarly connected with Domino's roommate, Sally. These last two women are interchangeable; when Domino disappears, she is replaced by Sally the next day.

Although Alice is giggling in her "nightmare," clearly enjoying her betrayal and humiliation of her husband (just as she burst out laughing at him earlier), once she awakens her laughter turns to tears and she says "I had such a horrible dream." The repression is instantaneous. Her resentment of her husband, the malice that prompts her to tell him the story of the naval officer, may be motivated by her unconscious recognition that she is a kept woman. We know she is unemployed, her art gallery having gone broke. She tells Sandor Szavost she's "looking for a job," but we don't see her looking; mostly we see her being looked at. Her role as an object is defined by her first on-screen line: "How do I look?" Bill tells her she looks beautiful, as does everyone else; she's also complimented by such admirers of beauty as Victor Ziegler and Sandor Szavost. Ziegler tells her she looks "absolutely stunning—and I don't say that to all the women." "Oh, yes, he does," says his wife—a joke that resonates unfunnily when we remember who "all the women" associated with Ziegler are. During the quotidian-life-of-the-Harfords montage in which her husband examines patients at the office, we only see Alice tending to her toilette: brushing her daughter's hair, regally hooking on a brassiere, applying deodorant in front of the bathroom mirror. Hers is the daytime life of a courtesan (or a movie star), devoted to the maintenance of her beauty. When we last see Alice in the film, in the department store, she is surrounded by shelves full of stuffed tigers identical to the one on Domino's bed, linking her again to the vanished prostitute. (Tiger- and leopard-print patterns are also used in *Lolita* to connote Charlotte Haze's predatory sexuality.)

Alice is also grooming her daughter Helena (named after the most beautiful woman in history) to become a high-priced thing of beauty like herself. During the Alice's-day-at-home montage, we see Helena alongside her in almost every shot, holding the hairbrush while her mother gathers her hair into a ponytail, brushing her teeth at the mirror while her mom applies deodorant, learning to attend to her appearance. When we overhear Helena doing word problems with her mother, she's learning to work out who has more money than whom. We hear her reading a bedtime story aloud, reciting the line, ". . . before me when I jump into my bed." In this film, a line about "jumping into bed" cannot be innocent. Her mother silently mouths it along with her, echoing and coaching her.

Like his wife, Bill is defined by his first line: "Honey, have you seen my wallet?" Just as his wife is a possession, he is a buyer. ("Doctor Bill," as Domino calls him, is another of Kubrick's Swiftian puns, like Jack D. Ripper.) He flashes his credentials and hands out fifty- and hundred-dollar bills to charm, bribe, or intimidate cabbies, clerks, and hookers—all members of the vast compliant service economy upon whom the enormous disparities of American wealth are built, the sorts of people who just have to smile and take it if they're being paid. Bill is nothing if not a conspicuous consumer: including (unconsummated) prostitution, costume rental, and cab fare, his tab for a single night out totals over seven hundred dollars in cash. He does not seem fazed by the expenditure. His asking Domino "Should we talk about money?", his repeated insistence on paying her for services not rendered, his haggling with Milich over the cost of after-hours costume rental—these financial dialogues are too frequent, too conspicuous, and too drawn-out to be included only in the interest of mundane verisimilitude (they do not occur in the novel). Harford even tears a hundred dollar bill in half with a boyish, self-congratulatory grin, giving one half to his cab driver and keeping the other as insurance that the driver will wait for him. (You can't help but wonder whether it was a real Ben Franklin, and, if so, how many takes Kubrick required of this shot.)

Bill's nocturnal journey into illicit sexuality is, more significantly, a journey into invisible strata of wealth. Money is the subtext of sex from the very first temptation of Bill; the two models who flirtatiously draw him away from his wife at Ziegler's ball invite him, enigmatically, to follow them "where the rainbow ends." It's at that moment that he's called away, saying to them, "To be continued?" After he has gone, the two models exchange a cryptic, conspiratorial look. It's a moment, as Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* noted, that foreshadows Bill's finding himself at Rainbow Costume Rentals. "To be continued," indeed. We never find out exactly what the two models meant, but every child knows what lies at the end of the rainbow.

The colorful arc of Bill's adventure does end at the pot of gold, the innermost sanctum of the ultra-wealthy where the secret orgy is held. The orgy scenes, in particular, were singled out by reviewers for disappointment, derision, and other disguised griping about

critical blueballs. (David Denby, in *The New Yorker*, called it "The most pompous orgy in the history of film." "More ludicrous than provocative, more voyeuristic than scary," complained Michiko Kakutani. "Whose idea of an orgy is this," groaned Stephen Hunter, "the Catholic Church's?") But again reviewers mistake Kubrick's artistic choices, which are the opposite of the sensual. When Bill passes through the ornate portal past golden-masked doorman, we should know that we are entering the realm of myth and nightmare. This sequence is the clearest condemnation, in archetypal dream-imagery, of elite society as corrupt, exploitative, and depraved—what they used to call, in a simpler time, evil. The pre-orgy rites are overtly Satanic, a Black Mass complete with a high priest gowned in crimson, droning organ, and backward-masked lyrics. The haunted ambiance recalls that of the film's other big exclusive party, Ziegler's; the opulent surroundings (including more appropriated historical styles, from Moorish to medieval to French imperial, floor-to-ceiling bookcases, tapestries, oil portraits of stern patriarchs), the mannered, leaden dialogue, the camera afloat like the disembodied point-of-view in a dream. A ballroom full of naked, masked couples dancing to "Strangers in the Night" again recalls the Overlook Hotel, whose ghosts also danced and coupled in costume. (Remember the single quick, surreal zoom shot in *The Shining* of someone in a grotesque, bestial costume fellating the tuxedoed millionaire Horace Derwent in an upstairs room.)

The scene makes the metaphor of sexual "objectification" visually literal. The ritual prostitutes, who are themselves objects purchased for sexual use, wear masks that make them identical and interchangeable. Their nude bodies are unnaturally perfect, smooth and immaculate as mannequins, photographed with the cold Kubrickian detachment that desaturates them of any eroticism. The sex we see consists of static tableaus of spectators (some of them digitally generated) posed around mechanically rutting participants. A man on all fours serves as a platform for a fornicating couple, a piece of furniture like the tables at the Korova Milk Bar in *A Clockwork Orange*. One might remember, with a shudder, the Lugosian-toned Szavost inviting Alice to have casual sex upstairs, among the sculptures.

The Venetian masks worn by the revelers (Venice, center of another mercantile empire) serve a similar symbolic purpose, the transformation of the wearer into a soulless object. They certainly aren't expressive of ecstatic self-annihilation, as some critics have suggested; they're creepy as hell. We see a bird with a scythe-like beak, a cubist face fractured in half, contorted grimaces and leers, a frozen howl, painted tears, blindly gazing eyes. These revelers have "lost themselves" not in erotic abandon but in the same way that the recruits in *Full Metal Jacket* lose their selves, along with their hair and their names. The utterly still, silent shots of staring masks at Bill's "trial" are images of empty-eyed dehumanization, faces of death. Here, ironically, the guests at Ziegler's party are unmasked for what they really are.

Masks and mannequins are a recurring motif in Kubrick's work: the fight with mannequin limbs in *Killer's Kiss*, the erotic furniture at the Korova, the rubber masks worn by Johnny in *The Killing* and by Alex and his droogs. In *Eyes Wide Shut* they appear not just in the orgy but throughout the film, always as harbingers of death: a stone Greek mask stands by Lou Nathanson's deathbed, and African masks look down at the bed where Harford has his interrupted trick with the HIV-positive Domino like the masked spectators watching sex acts at Somerton. A "domino" is itself a kind of mask. Costumed mannequins surround Harford and Milich in the back room at Rainbow Costumes. "Like life, eh?" says Milich, just before he catches his daughter consorting with two men in lurid makeup and wigs. Milich's daughter, for all the coquettish depravity in her face, looks somehow as eerily inanimate as the Grady twins in *The Shining*—her skin is smooth and white as the mannequins' in the back room, her painted lips and glittering eyes perfect as a china doll's. "If Dr. Harford should need anything else," says Milich, hugging his daughter close like the little goldmine she is, "Anything at all . . . it needn't be a costume." This line, obviously offering her for sale, reinforces the visual equation of the girl with the costumes which are the store's more legitimate merchandise. And the three times we see Mandy, the ex-beauty queen and hooker, her face is always a mask: in Ziegler's bathroom, as she's coming back from the brink of an overdose, her eyes are lit to appear as black, empty holes in her face; at the orgy, she's literally masked; and on the slab at the morgue her face is slack and white, her eyes wide open but sightless.

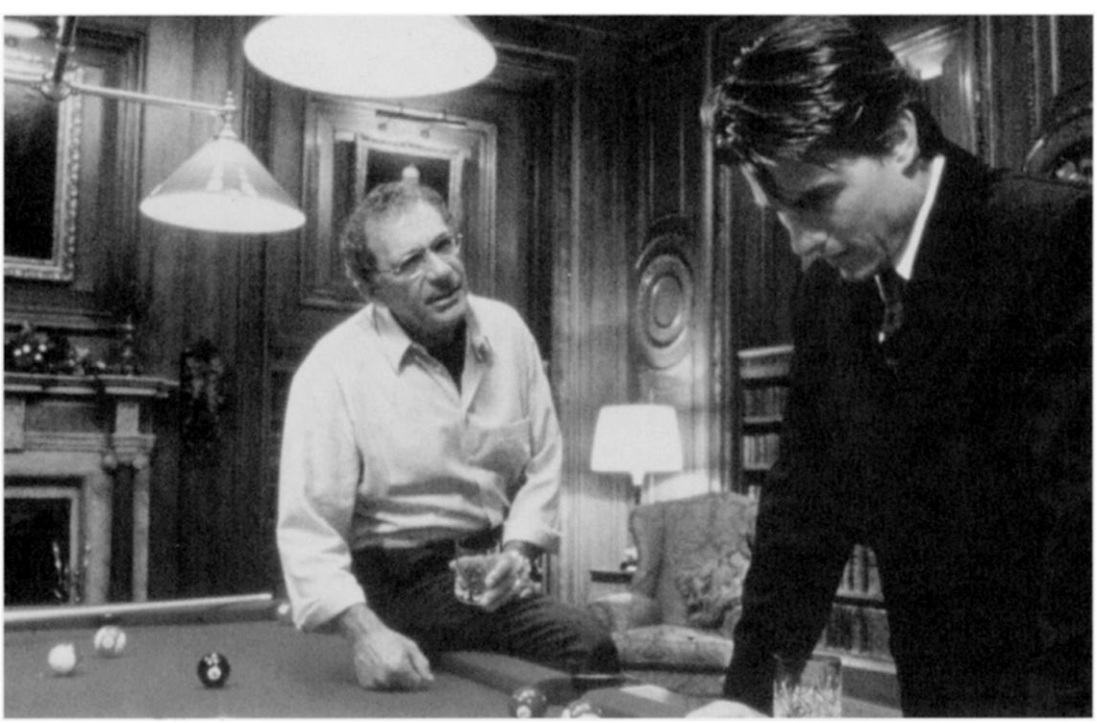
For all his flaunting of money and professional rank, and all his efforts to penetrate the inner circle of the elite, Bill Harford is ultimately put back in his place as a member of the serving class. Recall how he is summoned away from Ziegler's party in the same polite but perfunctory manner as is his friend, the pianist Nick; like Nick, Bill, too, is only hired help, the party physician, called upon to repair (if possible) and cover up (if necessary) human messes like Mandy. When he goes to Lou Nathanson's, he is met at the door by a maid who approaches through a door from the other direc-

tion, mirroring his movement. They are both dressed in black with white collars, facing each other in a perfectly symmetrical foyer where every other object is in a matched pair. The shot doubles them, identifying them as equals. Bill is given away when he tries to infiltrate the orgy by telltale distinctions of his class status—he shows up in a taxi (not a limo) and has a costume rental slip in his coat pocket. When Ziegler calls him onto the carpet for his transgression, he chuckles at Bill's firm refusal of a case of 25-year-old Scotch (Bill's a Bud man), not just because this extravagance would be a trifle to Ziegler, but because Bill's pretense of integrity is an empty gesture—he is already bought and paid for. Bill may own Alice, but Ziegler owns him.

When Bill persists in making inquiries, he is rebuked and intimidated into confession by his master. "You've been way out of your depth for the last 24 hours," Ziegler tells him, shaking his head in disgust. During the same conversation he says, "Who do you think those people were? Those were not ordinary people there. If I told you their names—I'm not going to tell you their names, but if I did, you might not sleep so well." We can only assume they are politicians and moguls, the sorts of supremely wealthy and powerful men who can buy and sell "ordinary" men like Bill and Nick Nightingale, and fuck or kill women like Mandy and Domino.

Although Ziegler has a credible explanation for everything that's happened—Harford's harassment, Nick Nightingale's beating and coerced escort out of town, Mandy's death—we don't ever really know whether he's telling the truth or lying to cover up Mandy's execution and assuage Bill's unexpectedly activated conscience. Note how Ziegler introduces his explanation: "*Suppose* I were to tell you . . ." giving Bill an escape, a believable story to buy. Ziegler does seem to have suspiciously privileged access to details of the case: "The door was locked from the inside, the police are satisfied, case closed! [dismissive fart noise]." And his last word on the subject—"Life goes on. It always does . . . until it doesn't. But you know that, don't you, Bill?"—proffered with an avuncular, unpleasantly proprietary rub of the shoulders, is both a reassurance and a threat. In the end, Bill chooses to accept Ziegler's explanations not because there is any convincing evidence to confirm them, but because they are convenient, an excuse to back down from the dangers of further inquiry.

Of course, Bill hasn't actually killed anyone. But he is implicated in the exploitation and deaths of all the women he encounters. (As the sign over the bar at the Sonata Café says, "The Customer Is Always Wrong.") Bill didn't give Domino HIV, but he might as well have; she certainly contracted it servicing someone like him. Milich alternates with hilarious aplomb between berating the men he's caught with his daughter—"Will you please to be quiet! Can't you see I am trying to serve a customer?"—and unctuous apologies to Har-



Sydney Pollack as Victor Ziegler, and Cruise

ford, conflating the two exchanges. (After all, Bill isn't paying just for a costume, but for the sexual opportunity he hopes it'll afford him.) And does it really make a difference whether Mandy was ceremonially executed by an evil cabal or only allowed, finally, to overdose after being gangbanged again? For the darkly humorous literalist in Kubrick ("Gentlemen, you can't fight in here; this is the War Room!", "Wendy, I'm not gonna hurt you . . . I'm just gonna bash your brains in!"), when Ziegler explains that Mandy wasn't murdered, she just "got her brains fucked out," the contradiction is obvious. Bill learns of her death in a café whose walls are covered with antique portraits of women, while Mozart's *Requiem* plays in the background. The setting and the music make the moment timeless, universal; the requiem is not just for this one dead hooker but for all the anonymous, expendable women who have been destroyed by men of Harford's class throughout the ages.

After Bill's confession to his wife, in the film's upbeat but dissonant denouement, the Harfords (like so many reviewers) are still wrapped up in the psychology of their own sexualities, missing the wider implications of what's onscreen. They've taken their daughter Helena Christmas shopping, but they respond to her wishes only politely, preoccupied as usual with their childish inner selves. Their dialogue, transcribed pretty much verbatim from *Traumnovelle*, is so allusive and disjointed that it's hard even to understand what they're supposed to be talking about. (If we believe that the mask was placed on Bill's pillow not by Alice but by Ziegler's cabal as a last warning and threat, then they're not just reconciling over Bill's indiscretions; they are agreeing to be accomplices after the fact to a homicide.) But, as in so much of Kubrick's work, the dialogue is misdirection; the real story is told visually. Ignored by her parents, poor Helena flits anxiously from one display to another, already an avid consumer, holding up one toy and then another. And every item she fondles associates her with the women who have been exploited by her father's circle: a baby carriage (recalling the stroller seen twice outside Domino's apartment, and placed next to a stuffed tiger just like the one on Domino's bed), an oversized teddy bear (next to a whole rack of those tigers), and a Barbie doll (recalling Milich's daughter) dressed in a diaphanous angel's costume like the one Helena wears at the beginning of the film. Another toy conspicuously displayed is called "The Magic Circle"; the name is an allusion to the ring of ritual prostitutes at the orgy, and the bright red color of the box recalls the carpet on which they genuflected to the cloaked high priest as well as the felt of the pool table over which Bill made his own bargain with the devil. The subplot with Milich and his daughter is clearly echoed here, in another place of business, as the Harfords, too, casually pimp their own little angel out to the world of commerce.

> ALICE: And, you know, there is something very important we have to do as soon as possible.
> BILL: What's that?
> ALICE: Fuck.

As *Eyes Wide Shut* closes, this final exchange between Bill and Alice suggests that all the dark adventures they've confessed ("whether they were real or only dreams"), and all the crimes in which they are complicit, have occasioned nothing more than another kinky turn-on, no more enlightening than the dalliances at Ziegler's ball that inflamed their lovemaking when they got home. Bill and Alice have learned nothing; for all their incoherent talk about being "awake" now, their eyes are still wide shut. Reconciled, they plan to forget all this unpleasantness soon in the blissful oblivion of orgasm. (Try keeping your eyes open during orgasm.) Maybe, in the end, it *is* a film about sexual obsession after all; audiences and critics, like the Harfords, remain obsessed with sex to the end, oblivious to what's right before their eyes. Maybe the customer *is* always wrong.

Certainly a subtler psychological interpretation of the film than has been attempted would be possible. But to focus exclusively on the Harfords' unexamined inner lives is to remain blind to the profoundly visual filmic world that Kubrick devoted a career's labors to creating. The slice of that world he tried to show us in his last—and, he believed, his best—work, the capital of the American Empire at the end of the millennium, is one in which the wealthy, powerful, and privileged use the rest of us like throwaway products, covering up their crimes with shiny surfaces and murder, ultimately dooming their own children to servitude and whoredom. The feel-good ending intimates, in Kubrick's last word on the subject, that the Harfords' daughter is—just as they have abandoned themselves to being—fucked.

Tim Kreider is a writer and artist living in the Chesapeake Bay area. His cartoon, "The Pain—When Will It End?" appears weekly in the *Baltimore City Paper* and is collected in comic books under the same title.

Note

My conversations with Rob Content, Boyd White, and Bart Taylor have been extremely helpful in developing this argument.

Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl

Director: Joan Chen. Writers: Yan Geling, Chen.
Producers: Chen, Allison Liu, Cecile Shah Tsuei.
Cinematographer: Lu Yue. Stratosphere Entertainment.

At first glance, veteran actress Joan Chen seems to have done what every enterprising Chinese dissident would have loved to do: pack a bus full of cast and crew, trundle off to a forbidden border of Tibet and China, and shoot a film worthy enough of arousing the rancour of an arrogant government—all on a shoestring budget. Like Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* and Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Seven Years in Tibet*, her film uses the beauty of the Tibetan landscape as a template for exposing China's dismal human rights record.

The message behind the film, however, is anything but straightforward. *Xiu Xiu: The Sent Down Girl*—shown as *Tian Yu* (*Heavenly Pond*) in Asia—stands alone amid the pageant of China-bashing films as a political conundrum. Joan Chen's perplexing take on China renders the earnest indignation of Hollywood films about "the Tibet question" hopelessly one-dimensional. A simple film with two Chinese actors unknown outside of their own country, *Xiu Xiu* is a gorgeously filmed, harrowing tale of a government's idealism gone wrong. Yet, for all its cinematic glory on screen, nothing teases the cinema-goer's imagination more than the perplexing dissonance between what the film's makers and advertisers claim the film to be, and what unfolds on the screen.

A love story between a man and a woman. A haunting raw landscape of wildflowers and sky. A tale of compassion, lost love, martyrdom, innocence. That's apparently how the film's marketers—including Chen herself—wanted the American cinemagoer to interpret the film. Chen says in her director's statement to the press that the landscape of the Tibetan border was "haunting yet beautiful," that Xiu Xiu was a "martyr . . . born under the silver moonlight." She describes how she and screenwriter Yan Geling finished writing the script "during the most beautiful month of the year on the high plateau." Chen gets high marks for waxing lyrical about her story, but her film is at odds with her marketing intent. It's just as well that much of the film takes place in a cheerless, icy wasteland without a name—it is a story about the termination of hope and life, a bone-chilling indictment of a political system that victimizes its own offspring, then blames them for their failures.

Xiu Xiu traces a bizarre program run by Communist China in the 1960s–70s of "sending down" urban prepubescents to the remote Chinese countryside in order to seal the ideological gulf between the city bourgeois and the illiterate sons of the soil. The children, each wearing a military-issue coat, wave flags and sing patriotic jingles as they are packed off into military trucks.

Typical of ideological governments whose social agendas are far loftier than the morals of the people who execute them, the Cultural Youth Revolution ended up mass-mailing children like Xiu Xiu into the outermost regions of the steppes, where they were stranded for years because the people who crafted their leadership programs had changed their minds, moved on, and forgotten about them. Disoriented, lonely, and desperate, these urban teens became easy prey for the packs of petty village officials and corrupted peasantry who harbored little cultural or social empathy for them.

Strangely, for all the razor-sharp political observations in her film, Chen claims she is no dissident. Seemingly apologetic about offending the Chinese government, she paid up the fine for shooting on the Tibetan border without permission. She has explained her act without any indignation, rancor, or even slight irritation at her government for restricting artistic enterprise in a manner unfamiliar to many other countries. Her attitude suggests that perhaps not all who criticize authoritarian regimes do so without deference to their awful power, and that "dissent" and "nationalistic pride" may sometimes be the most natural of bedfellows. American moviegoers who are titillated by film's advertisements (bearing the gleeful marketing stamp "Banned in China for Political and Sexual Content") and who come away thinking they have seen another sad, beautiful film about the "awful Tibet situation" may not be truly appreciating the pedigree and psychological ambivalence of its makers.

It is no secret that Joan Chen grew up in Mao China and was personally hand-picked by Mao's infamous wife, the ambitious and ruthless Jiang Qing, to be a model young actress. Yan Geling, who wrote the novella upon which *Xiu Xiu* is based and scripted the film with Chen, belonged to Chen's generation. For both Yan and Chen, the experience of being "sent down" by the Communist government was a prevalent threat in their youth. Both female artists are no stranger to "The System": its cold calculation of human life, its sorting of human talents, its casting of individual destinies. They saw it happen to fathers, friends, neighbors. They narrowly escaped: the system, recognizing their artistic talents, had a better plan for them. Chen was drafted into an

Child of the system: Lee Xaiolu as Wen Xiu, the sent down girl

acting program in the Shanghai Film Studio in 1975; Yan was trained as professional ballerina at age 12 to perform for the People's Liberation Army.

That these two extraordinary young prodigies could come out of the Communist system two decades later and make a film about the system that sorted their own fortunes testifies to the human intellect's irrepressible and admirable capacity for self-reflection. *Xiu Xiu* is a bittersweet memory of two Chinese artistic superstars about their own loss of innocence. It seems that both women, who have married and settled in the United States, have come together to make an elegiac tribute from afar to those from their generation who didn't make it. Because of the tension between marketing and political intent, it is easier to read *Xiu Xiu* as not so much a dissident's film as a cathartic work of art (precipitating perhaps from its makers' own tremors of survivor guilt?). "*Xiu Xiu* commemorates the last generation that came of age during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," says the director in her press statement. Chen, Yan, and the rest of their distinguished cast and crew are genuine children of the very system that they depict, and they have come together to look back with mixed feelings at their cultural history. Precisely because the State has its hand in every domain of intellectual life in China, the film's cast and crew were hand-picked, raised, accoladed, and primed by the Chinese Government. Thus, if one comes away thinking how brave and controversial these "dissidents" were in making a banned film, one perhaps underestimates the greater psychological complexity—and intellectual beauty—of what Chen and Yan have wrought.

Consideration of the filmmaker's background is important for another reason. It is almost too easy to forget, since Chen herself is so famous in Hollywood, that *Xiu Xiu* is directed by a China-born woman. Viewers are so used to Chen's sex-siren charm that one might have expected a pretty little film rather than the political bombshell that it is (flowers, sunsets, and all). *Xiu Xiu* brings home the point that before she was a pretty face, Chen was an artistic product of the second largest Communist regime in the world. It is refreshing to see Chen articulate in her own cultural medium and in her own gendered vision.

The imprint of a female directorial vision asserts itself in piercingly sad ways throughout the film, and Chen's narrative willingly embraces all these aspects

"The perfect flower"

of her heroine's body (one of the first scenes shows Xiu Xiu's mother carefully packing rough-hewn "fancy-grade" toilet paper and a handsewn cotton garter for her daughter's period before Xiu Xiu leaves for the barren countryside). In doing so, she reminds us in heart-breaking ways of the quotidian and human aspects of girlhood, so that we will later feel even more keenly the physical pain that Xiu Xiu undergoes in the film. The mother's tender worry for her daughter's intimate needs will contrast sharply with the chauvinist brutality of the system that invades and desecrates her daughter's person.

Lee Xiaolu (Lu Lu) plays Wen Xiu ("refined and exquisite"), the perfect flower of Chinese girlhood around whom this sad operetta of youth corrupted revolves. The 15-year old actress discovered by Chen reminds us of young Chen herself in her early film, *Little Flower* (1979), when she smiles her sharp-chinned, poster-perfect smile. Xiu Xiu is the very incarnation of Communist Youth posters, complete with cheap nylon taffeta scarf, striped sweater, and symmetrical pigtails. A nubile Lolita, Xiu Xiu romps around the film flashing her child-like nudity at men with gullible ease. Almost from the very beginning, Chen films her little protégée with adoring close-ups, making us fall in love with her babyish sweetness even as we shudder in the anticipation of some horrible fate.

True enough, Chen then brings us down a roller-coaster track of child sexual exploitation and innocence gnawed to the raw as Xiu Xiu is repeatedly and brutally raped by small-time peddlers and petty officials in the countryside. Her physical corruption, however, is not as depressing as the mental corruption that she inherits from her sexual abusers. As if to illustrate how a mind can be rendered soft and facile when habitually force-fed with government propaganda, Xiu Xiu easily believes everything that comes forth from the lips of adult men. They tell her that the way pretty girls like her can get home quickly is to offer her body to them. They can get her the relevant paperwork to escape. After all, no child can see her parents again unless she convinces a government official to give her a return permit. Any child caught in the city without a permit would be sent back into the countryside in a trice. That's right. Think about it. Here's some "candy." She takes it, and the game begins.

Desperate to see her parents and her beloved urban environment again, Xiu Xiu numbly consents to being

pummeled and sodomized at all hours of the night. Typical of desperate civilians under a Communist regime, Xiu Xiu would do anything to survive. This was the only "education" that Xiu Xiu ever received from her government. Imbibing their lies as easily as she had imbibed party indoctrination, she says with child-like simplicity, "How else can a girl get by? After all, I have nothing: no money, no connections . . . I only have myself." As word gets round that a pretty city child out in the steppes can be had for a song, more and more anonymous men from the village headquarters casually drive by to have sex with her, each deluding her with lies.

Heroism, like hope, never has a chance to rear its head in Chen's bleak tale. Tibetan actor Lopsang plays the male lead, Lao Jin, a Tibetan herdsman into whose tent Xiu Xiu is unceremoniously dumped by program staff as part of her "training" in the art of peasant life. Joan Chen wrote that she thought of Lopsang as the perfect "fairytale hero," but her romantic assertion is belied by the testimony of her own film. Swarthy, muscular, and perennially armed with a rifle, Lao Jin does carve a heroic figure in the film as the gruff Caliban who adores Xiu Xiu. Yet the protector-princess romance fails to develop. Lao Jin was brutally castrated by his enemies during a Tibetan war; as a result, he has chosen to lead a solitary existence with a flock of wild horses, turning away from life and opportunity in order to live out his own enigma.

That Chen chose as her main subjects a young Chinese girl and a castrated Tibetan pauper is no coincidence. These are by far the most telling archetypes of politically oppressed peoples in China. Chen excruciatingly illustrates what such disenfranchised groups have lost by emphasizing Lao Jin's mental impotence. The vacuum of heroism hums deafeningly in her film: Lao Jin cannot fill the heroic niche in the story. When petty tradesmen saunter into his own tent to rape Xiu Xiu before his very eyes, Lao Jin can only lower his gaze in regret. Even though he is armed to the teeth, and has no problems firing at people who come near his livestock, he does not dare to raise his rifle against Xiu Xiu's rapists. So powerful and entrenched is the exploitative system that Lao Jin did not even think of challenging it. In a blinding moment of suppressed rage, all Lao Jin can do is to pluck the rapist's shoe surreptitiously from under the bed and burn it in the fire as the merest whisper of civil disobedience.

Chen rather duplicitously writes that she thought of Lao Jin as the personification of the "nobleness of the human emotion called love." Yet throughout the entire film, Lao Jin displays a powerfully wretched passivity that is quite compatible with Xiu Xiu's own infantile vulnerability. Their final decision, which leads to the tragic conclusion of the film, resembles more the cul-de-sac desperation of a people who have lost all hope and who have nothing to live for. Passivity and the implicit acceptance of evil robs Lao Jin of the heroism of the archetypal tragic hero. His every act—and omission—in the film can be seen as a politically resonant moment that reverberates within the history of Chinese oppression. His behavior speaks volumes about how the Chinese Communist regime destroys people's regard of their own self-worth and possibilities.

Chen claims that her urge to direct her first film came from sitting through too many "end-of-the-millennium," "nihilistic" pictures at the 1996 Berlin Film Festival. She was inspired to make a "more hopeful, more poetic" tale. If Chen really means what she says, *Xiu Xiu* is a classic demonstration of how the poem may be larger than the poet. Chen may dress up her film with flowers, soaring melodies, and pink-cheeked grins, but she also deals with death, rape, and loss with a heavy hand. Besides, today's audiences, numbed by media coverage of daily atrocities in the international arena, can hardly be expected to ignore the politics of exploitation in *Xiu Xiu.*

Yet the director and her film marketers are keen to sell *Xiu Xiu* to American audiences as a beautiful love story set in sumptuous National Geographic landscape—"a fable that redeemed the innocence of a lost generation," gushes the press kit "[about] the timeless imagination of love." And, based on the pedigree of the film's creators and Chen's press statements and payment of the fine to the Chinese authorities, it is hard to believe that Chen intended her product as an indictment of the government that gave her the shot at stardom at an early age.

Nonetheless, Art asserts itself in curious ways. Yan Geling tells us that *Xiu Xiu* was based on the true life story of a woman she herself had known as a child and met after the Cultural Youth Revolution. All that happened to the screen Xiu Xiu happened to her friend—except that the *real* Xiu Xiu lived. "She told me how she suffered psychologically and physically," says Yan in her press statement. "But she managed not to lose herself, or to lose her hope."

Interestingly, Chen and Yan chose not to make a film about the triumph of human hope over circumstances. They preferred a very different ending. Their coda is a sharp, well-aimed stab of political criticism—a singular gesture, but a powerful one.

Joan Chen's public attitude about her film, which jars so interestingly with the message of the film itself, perhaps reflects her generation's own schizophrenic uncertainty about the system that has sculpted their careers and run their lives. She frames an interesting question: Can someone made successful by her own political system publicly turn against it? The director's reaction to her country proves that despite the Western press's ceaseless commentary on how China chooses to handle its domestic affairs, there are no clear-cut answers as to who is in the right. The Cultural Youth Movement was a horrific enterprise, but Chen and Yan claim they can see beauty in it—a kind of beauty paired with regret and a latent anger at what had to happen.

But those of us who didn't share their upbringing and can't see much "sweet" in their bittersweet tale, may find it difficult to be distracted from the bleak conclusions prompted by the film. One may speculate about the filmmakers' intent in dressing up a brutal tragedy in the colors of romance; one may incline to blame the distorting forces of film marketing, yet the film's final moments leave little doubt about Chen and Yan's intentions. The tragedy that both Xiu Xiu and Lao Jin share as exploited peoples on the lowest rung of a gigantic bureaucracy form a tidy and chilling parable of the horrors of absolutism. Despite yards of film dedicated to breathtaking landscapes and dimpled smiles, Chen's creation is just about as sweet as cyanide.

"Power kills, and absolute power kills absolutely," quotes Iris Chang in her 1997 work, *The Rape of Nanking*, when discussing the dynamics of war and oppression. The phrase came from R. J. Rummel's book, *Death by Government*, a study of genocide and government-motivated mass murder, and could easily have served as a sound bite for *Xiu Xiu*. Like *The Rape of Nanking*, Joan Chen's film testifies to the effects of absolute power when pursued to its logical conclusion. Chang, however, was writing about the genocidal horrors that Japanese troops had visited upon the Chinese during World War II. The fact that postwar China could revisit such rapes upon its own children during peace time makes Chen's indictment all the more scorching.

Wena Poon lives in New York City and frequently covers Asian culture and politics for the press in her native country of Singapore.

A Very Natural Thing (1974), The Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Library

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Book Reviews

Agent of Challenge and Defiance

The Films of Ken Loach

Edited by George McKnight. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997. $24.95 paper; $59.95 cloth.

This collection of essays is aptly titled. It examines one of the most neglected but enduring talents in British cinema and television, who has heroically criticized his national social system in both fair weather and foul. Ken Loach has been active for a 30-year period that encompasses the "swinging 60s," Old Labour Party stagnation, vicious Thatcherite reaction, and contemporary New Labour right-wing revisionism. However, despite changing visual fashions, his style maintains a stubborn fidelity to a movement many dismiss as old-fashioned and irrelevant to a supposedly postmodern era—naturalism.

Disdainful of the contemporary market-orientated box office strategies now ruthlessly dominating both Hollywood and British cinema, Loach has often struggled to present an alternative vision of the losers within reactionary periods past and present. It is a vision never contaminated by false optimism but always cognizant of the personal and political obstacles people face in their everyday lives. Often collaborating with diverse figures such as producer Tony Garnett and Trotskyist playwright Jim Allen, Loach has demonstrated his "challenge and defiance" from the now defunct Golden Age of British television (associated with other talents such as Nell Dunn, David Mercer, Dennis Potter, and Jeremy Sandford, whose work would be banned by the BBC today) to the 1990s. Although his work suffered from the critical onslaughts and misunderstandings of the once powerful and now dethroned 70s screen theory, it has proven more resilient and relevant than ever before. This collection of essays provides a stimulating introduction to a talent who deserves to be better known than other fashionable figures, such as Mike Leigh, a contemporary purveyor of that Ealing Studios quaint-character eccentricity so beloved by (and harmless to) to American audiences.

George McKnight's introductory essay respectfully promotes the relevance of Loach's work over the past 30 years in terms of its exploration of class, gender, and ideologically governed family structures in British society. Although Loach's British films appear to concentrate on "apparently unexceptional everyday situations" (5), they are never removed from economic and social issues which, especially in the 90s, generate desperate and hopeless feelings that often erupt into violence. Loach's work mainly concentrates upon the marginalized and neglected figures he is most familiar with. It never generates false illusions and optimism but scrupulously documents the betrayal of people's everyday lives by both the forces of reaction and those bodies such as the Labour Party and trade unions who are supposedly on the side of the oppressed. For example, Loach and Garnett's 1975 epic four-part television series, *Days of Hope,* documents an era of British social history from World War One to the 1926 General Strike and reveals that Stanley Baldwin's Conservative Party broke the latter movement by using plans drawn up by the former Labour Government. (This series is suspiciously unavailable from BBC Video at present, unlike those numerous Jane Austen adaptations!)

Loach often stresses the factor of betrayal by one's own side. His past work uncannily foreshadows the present politics practiced by Rupert Murdoch and Margaret Thatcher's favorite lapdog, Tony Blair. Stuart Levy provides an informative context concerning the development and reception of Loach's work from the 50s to the present day, while Julian Petley studies his fusion of drama and documentary in both film and television. However, the most wide-ranging essay in the collection is Deborah Knight's "Naturalism, Narration and Critical Perspective: Ken Loach and the Experimental Method." Despite naturalism's fashionable neglect and maltreatment by mundane interpretations in British television drama, Knight relates Loach's naturalistic practices to more dynamic and exploratory patterns found in the work of Emile Zola. As she notes, "Protagonists in the tradition of British naturalism are quite unlike protagonists in non-naturalistic genres. They are unheroic or anti-heroic protagonists caught up in what is obviously a difficult struggle to make a better lot for themselves. . . . The protagonists of naturalistic narratives are seldom able to break free from their constraints of their socio-cultural environments" (67). It is a good observation, but one that needs more focus on Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* series of novels and the author's grim (but realistic) observations about the necessity of realizing the powerful nature of antagonistic forces and of avoiding any false hopes and illusions, no matter how comforting they may be in the short term.

The other essays in this collection provide interesting perspectives concerning Loach's battles with British censorship, his continuing attempts to find links between politics and aesthetics in films such as *Fatherland*, *Hidden Agenda*, and *Riff-Raff*, and the international aspects of works such as *Fatherland*, *Land and Freedom* (and *Carla's Song*, which appeared after this collection went to press).

The book concludes with an informative interview with Loach by John Hill, McKnight's detailed filmography (which also contains references to Loach's early television work), and a selected bibliography. It is a valuable collection of special relevance to any serious study of contemporary British film and television that deals with a figure in danger of historical neglect or trivialization. In an era when British film and television are now characterized by demeaning examples such as *The Full Monty* and *Spiceworld*, as well as historical class fantasies such as *Mrs. Brown*, *Elizabeth*, and *Shakespeare in Love*, McKnight's collection is a warning note to those conscious of the neglect of an crucially important and relevant mode of artistic interpretation.

Tony Williams is Professor and Area Head of Film Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

The Sounds of Commerce

Marketing Popular Film Music

By Jeff Smith. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. $16.50 paper; $49.50 cloth.

While popular music and film have had close ties for several decades, scholars in both disciplines have been slow to acknowledge these ties and examine them from a creative or economic viewpoint. Jeff Smith effectively encompasses both perspectives in *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music.* At a time when film companies rely more and more on revenue from ancillary markets, Smith also provides readers with an exceptional analysis of one of these markets—music in the form of soundtracks, licensing opportunities, and publishing revenues.

The book is organized in an especially appealing manner to readers with a film or music background, or for those who have other backgrounds and are simply interested in this topic. Smith first offers a historical overview, then concentrates on the growth of popular music in films, beginning in the 1950s. The middle portion of the book includes three excellent chapters pertaining specifically to Henry Mancini, John Barry, and Ennio Morricone, three film composers the author feels are especially representative of the growth of the pop music score in motion pictures. The book is then neatly tied together with a resumption of the historical analysis from the 1960s to the present.

In order to provide the reader with necessary background information, Smith's historical summary begins in the early part of the century with a discussion of sheet music as a means of cross-promotion for both music publishers and, at this point in time, film exhibitors as opposed to film distributors. This discussion serves to remind readers just how ingrained the linkage is between music and film. It also points out the complex business issues related to film music by referencing the conflicts between the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) and theater owners over the use of ASCAP songs to accompany silent films. As the major film companies became vertically integrated and adopted sound technology, they, rather than the exhibitors, became the link between film and music. Suddenly, this linkage was reinforced as film companies hired songwriters and composers and bought or established music publishing companies.

This industrial history is complemented by a thorough stylistic history in which Smith gives a very sound analysis of the differences between a classical Hollywood score and a pop music score. His discussion of the role of Romanticism in music from the so-called "golden era" of film scores is quite enlightening and solidly supports his assertion that "the Romantic idiom proved to be uniquely suited to the needs of classical Hollywood narrative and classical Hollywood audiences."

While the book reflects meticulous research from start to finish, this research is especially impressive when applied to the author's primary discussion of the rise of the pop music score and its evolution from the 1950s to the present. The analysis references the cultural and technological changes contributing to this evolution along with the challenges inherent in such a transition. While these elements are important to an accurate understanding of the development of the pop score, its use as a marketing tool is of tremendous economic importance, and the book does a phenomenal job of illustrating the fiscal ramifications of music as a promotional device.

Specific films are utilized to serve as examples of the concepts discussed. These examples have been well selected and enhance the relevance of each concept. In addition to citing relevant films, the author has also selected three composers who serve as examples of creators who helped forge the popular score into a durable and profitable film music format. Mancini, Barry, and Morricone are each given a cleverly titled chapter in which their musical styles are analyzed in terms of their approaches to film scoring and the integration of the score and the story. Once again, films have been chosen in a discerning manner to represent each composer's style as well as his contribution to the field.

A brief discussion of Henry Mancini's jazz background provides readers with great insight into his film scores. Smith also provides a number of important nuances about Mancini's approach to scoring, including the fact that he possessed a "desire to give record buyers a good value" and the fact that Mancini typically rerecorded his film music for release on records. However, the chapter is titled "My Huckleberry Friend" and, indeed, the bulk of it is devoted to a discussion of "Breakfast at Tiffany's," which is perhaps Mancini's

Guidelines for Submissions

Film Quarterly is a long-established peer-review journal that invites the submission of articles, interviews, and reviews. The journal covers a wide range of topics, including history, theory, cultural analysis, national cinemas, documentary, television, and avant-garde and experimental film and video. Decisions about acceptance for publication are made by the editor and the journal's editorial board at meetings held quarterly, in early February, May, August, and November (deadlines for submissions are one month before the meetings). Submit one hard copy of your manuscript; it should be computer-generated, double-spaced, and paginated. Disks and photos should not be included with the submission; they will be required only if your piece is accepted, and guidelines for disk formatting will be provided at that time. (However, it might help to know at this point that we prefer endnotes to footnotes and that film titles should be in italics.) Please include a SASE if you want your manuscript to be returned. More extensive guidelines can be requested from the Editor, *Film Quarterly*, UC Press, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223; email: ann.martin@ucpress.ucop.edu Book reviews are assigned by the Book Review Editor. If you know of a book that you would like to review, or are generally interested in writing book reviews, please contact Stephen Prince at Virginia Tech, Dept. of Communication Studies, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0311; email: sprince@vt.edu *FQ* pays a nominal sum for published manuscripts—roughly $10.00/column (most articles are about 7,000 words, reviews and interviews usually somewhat shorter).

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Ennio Morricone's music is analyzed in terms of the composer's gift of fusing music and drama. Morricone's work with director Sergio Leone is highlighted in a chapter which will inevitably have the reader engaging in a musical analysis of the next Leone/Morricone film he or she sees after finishing the book. The author points out the multiple influences that combine in Morricone's scores to effectively balance the commercial and dramatic purposes. Readers interested in the technology associated with film music will especially enjoy this chapter's discussion of Scopitone and Cinebox, which were film jukebox devices marketed in the 60s. The chapter also includes a discussion of the practice of reverse scoring, in which the film is shot and edited to fit the music, as opposed to the standard scoring method, which is just the opposite.

No analysis of film music would be complete without a discussion of the compilation score, and Smith offers readers a detailed review of this approach, which involves scoring a film with a series of songs. He discusses the commercial advantages to this method and neatly traces its development. The move toward including multiple artists and diverse music styles into single film soundtracks is one of the most important film-music marketing developments, and the book uses a number of worthy examples to illustrate the economic effectiveness of this concept.

From an industrial history standpoint, some of the most interesting parts of the book pertain to the growth of the studio record labels and their evolution over time. Also of note is the author's discussion of the modern entertainment conglomerate and the increasing importance of music subsidiaries. While still viewed as a promotional tool, the film soundtrack is an excellent example of one of the multiple profit centers that can be supported by a single film in today's entertainment business environment. The increasing importance of music is highlighted by an economic discussion pointing out that the music subsidiaries of entertainment companies often outpace their film subsidiaries in terms of profit and serve to stabilize the volatility surrounding the filmed entertainment product. Smith also addresses the rise of specialty music labels, such as Varese Sarabande, which exclusively market movie music.

However, many complexities have arisen along with these new opportunities and increased profits. Smith points out the changing ownership and licensing arrangements with respect to the major studios' music divisions as well as the legal hurdles that are common in today's marketplace. In discussing the present state of film music, the author talks about new markets such as compact disks and videos as well as the increasing importance of the music supervisor in the current environment.

The most appealing aspect of the book is the tremendous scope with which it views its subject. The work includes components pertaining to marketing, music theory, cultural studies, economics, technology, and industrial history. It is just the sort of book to inspire additional studies in this field, and it definitely sets a standard of excellence for future research.

Rob Davis is Associate Director of the DeSantis Center for Motion Picture Industry Studies at Florida Atlantic University.

Tough Girls

Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture

By Sherrie A. Inness. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998. $19.95 paper; $47.50 cloth.

In *Tough Girls*, Sherrie Inness considers the relative toughness of women in a wide range of popular culture texts and forms: television shows like *Charlie's Angels*, *The Avengers*, *The Bionic Woman*, *The X-Files*, and *Xena, Warrior Princess*; films like the *Alien* and *Terminator* cycles, *Thelma & Louise*, *Tank Girl*, *Silence of the Lambs*; women's magazines; comic books. Inness contends that how tough women "are depicted in the media has become an important issue in recent years because they are being depicted more frequently than in past decades" (4), and that "popular media are still deeply ambivalent about how to depict tough women so that they do not challenge gender conventions too dramatically" (5). Both of these statements (which are repeated, with little variation or development, throughout the book) are true, but they are not news. No scholar of popular culture who's been paying attention to the work of his or her cohorts over the past ten-plus years should expect the mass media to be anything *but* "deeply ambivalent" about issues of identity politics, and Inness's failure to produce a nuanced and careful argument, or even a solid definition of toughness itself, reduces the book's usefulness considerably.

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Jacques, Charles Hawtrey, Kenneth Connor, and many others) who delighted audiences with "low comedy" performances.

Robert Ross's *Companion* contains an introduction by Phil Collins, synopses of the various films, comments by surviving actors, as well as descriptions of television and theatrical spin-offs. His book provides a valuable basis for introducing readers to the series and contributing a secure foundation for any relevant critical approaches. Once dismissed by critics and banned by "politically correct" National Film Theatre directors twenty years ago, the series was always popular with British audiences for sending up national institutions and fondly playing on stereotypes. Sid James's lovable rogue chasing scantily clad females, Barbara Windsor's accomplished "dumb blonde," and Kenneth Williams's playful "queen" all represented British cinema comedy at its best. It is not surprising, in eras suffering from Thatcherism and New Labour hypocrisy, that the series has regained its massive following among a younger audience attuned to the series' satiric overtones. Its music-hall Rabelesian and Bakhtinian overtones will always give the series a page in British cinema history, as well as suggesting future directions for American comedic assaults on their own institutions.

Tony Williams

Ruoff, Jeffrey, and Kenneth Ruoff. *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On: Yukiyukite shingun.* England: Flicks Books, 1998. In their contribution to Flicks's *Cinetek* Series—monographs devoted to "neglected, 'difficult' or confrontational films"—Jeffrey Ruoff and Kenneth Ruoff offer a searching account and reading of Kazuo Hara's 1987 documentary *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On* (*Yukiyukite shingun*), which they describe as the "most significant documentary film produced in Japan . . . since the end of the Pacific War." *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On* portrays Kenzô Okuzaki, a survivor of Japan's ill-fated military campaign in New Guinea, who later achieved political notoriety for firing from a slingshot *pachinko* balls at the Showa Emperor in a mock execution. The film follows Okuzaki's violent crusade to expose the crimes of murder and cannibalism committed by members of Japan's Imperial Army against Japanese soldiers *after* the end of the war. The sensational narrative is set against a formal structure that appears, at times, vehemently *superficial.*

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2) "Banned, marginalised through being screened exclusively in museums and classrooms . . ." This definitely does *not* apply to *The War Game*. It was banned from transmission on BBC in 1965, but this obviously enormously boosted its fame. I saw it in 1980, when an anti-nuclear group in my home town gave a free screening (of a 16mm print, I think). It was eventually broadcast on the BBC some years later to a large audience. I (and doubtless many others) taped a video copy off the air.

3) Alan Rosenthal describes *The Journey* as "awful" (page 52). This is an understandable assessment, as the film is sixteen hours long (not "fourteen-and-a-half," as he states on page 51). I saw the first nine hours at the National Film Theatre in London, in 1989. This took an entire Saturday—three three-hour screenings. I could not return on the Sunday for the last seven hours.

From the half which I saw, it was obvious that there was raw material for a tremendously powerful 90-minute anti-nuclear propaganda film. This would involve Watkins and/or a sympathetic cooperator in cutting 90 percent of the dreadfully boring padding out of the full movie. You would be left with an enthralling documentary, conveying much important information which is little known to the general public. For example, it says that in the event of nuclear war, a vital port in Norway (a NATO member!), would be nuked by NATO forces to deny it to the Warsaw Pact.

World events have moved on since *The Journey* was made, but I am convinced it could still attract a worthwhile audience in a summarised form. For the director's "full" version, there were nine people in the audience at the start of the Saturday screenings. By Saturday evening, there were three of us left. Only one planned to return on Sunday to see the last seven hours; I do not know if he actually came back. To put it mildly, this was a major disappointment for an important project into which a huge amount of time and effort had been poured.

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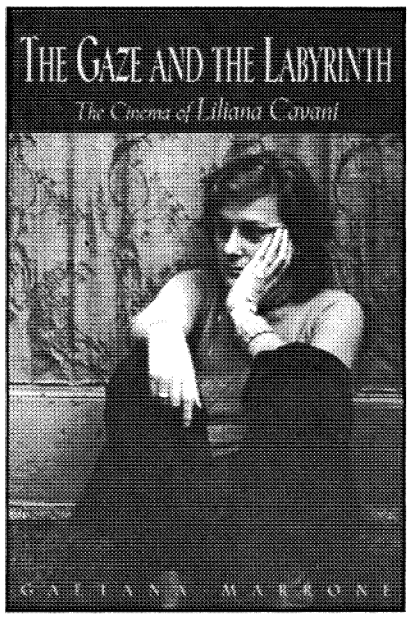

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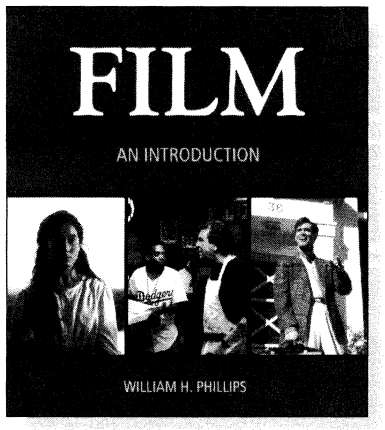

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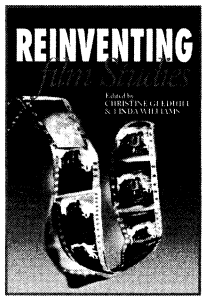

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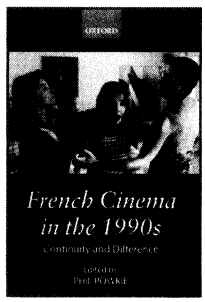

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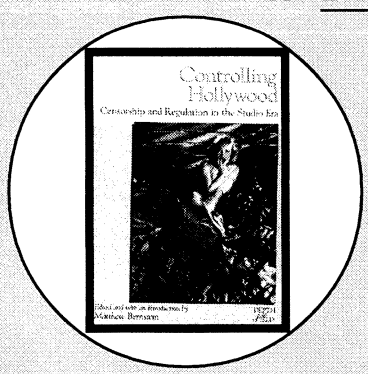

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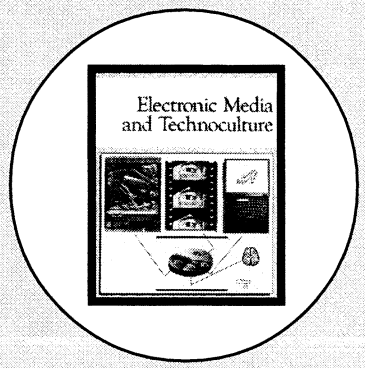

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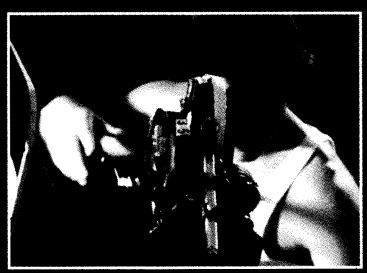

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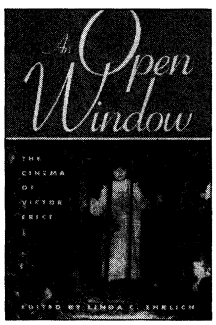

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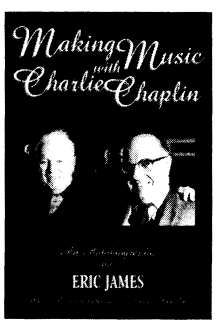

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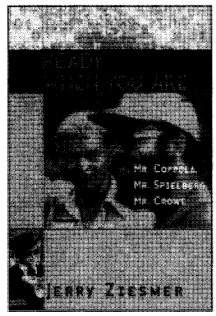

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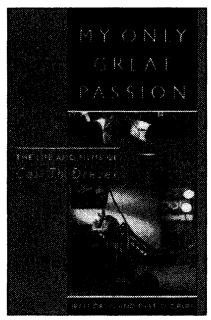

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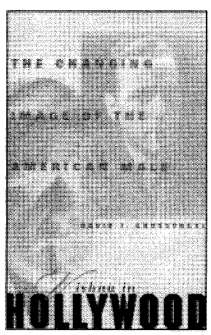

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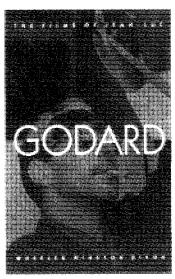

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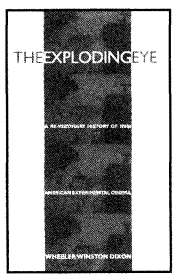

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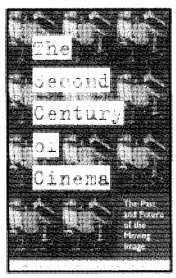

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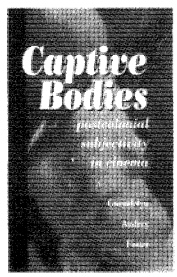

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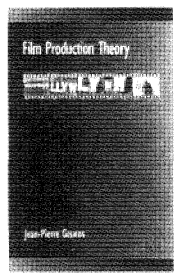

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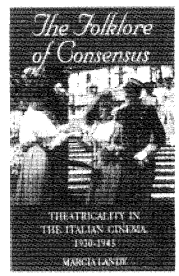

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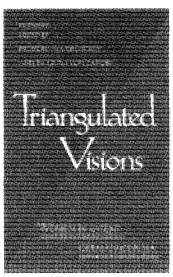

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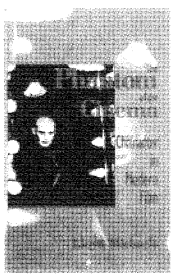

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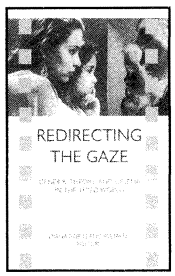

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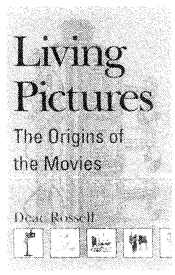

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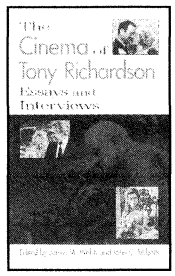

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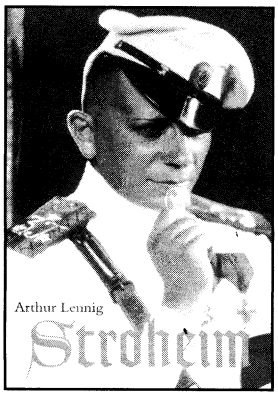

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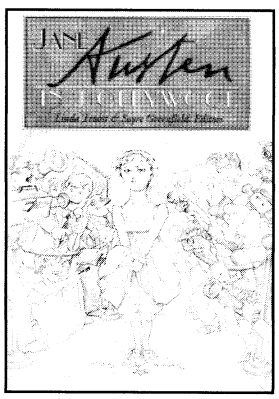

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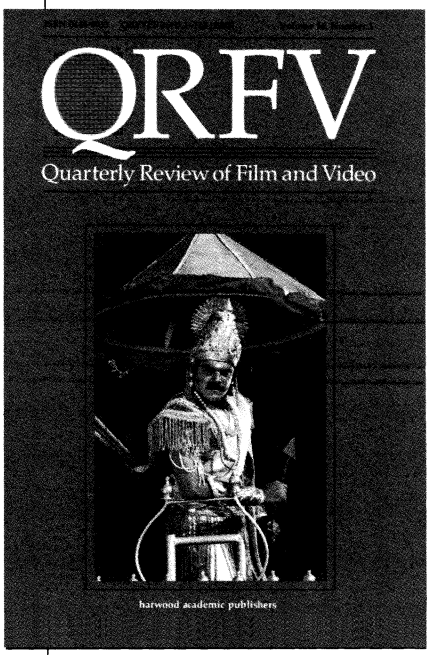

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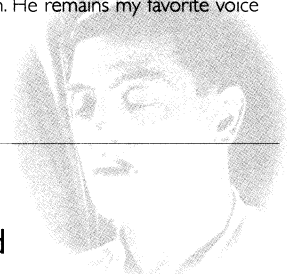

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